



Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East

CHILDREN IN THE BIBLE AND THE ANCIENT WORLD

**COMPARATIVE AND HISTORICAL METHODS IN
READING ANCIENT CHILDREN**

Edited by
Shawn W. Flynn



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Children in the Bible and the Ancient World

The topic of children in the Bible has long been under-represented, but this has recently changed with the development of childhood studies in broader fields, and the work of several dedicated scholars. While many reading methods are employed in this emerging field, comparative work with children in the ancient world has been an important tool to understanding the function of children in biblical texts.

Children in the Bible and the Ancient World broadly introduces children in the ancient world, and specifically children in the Bible. It brings together an international group of experts who help readers understand how children are constructed in biblical literature across three broad areas: children in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East, children in Christian writings and the Greco-Roman world, and children and materiality. The diverse essays cover topics such as: vows in Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible, obstetric knowledge, infant abandonment, the role of marriage, Greek abandonment texts, ritual entry for children into Christian communities, education, sexual abuse, and the role of archeological figurines in children's lives. The volume also includes expertise in biological anthropology to study the skeletal remains of ancient children, as well as how ancient texts illuminate Mary's female maturity. The volume is written in an accessible style suitable for non-specialists, and it is equipped with a helpful resource bibliography that organizes select secondary sources from these essays into meaningful categories for further study.

Children in the Bible and the Ancient World is a helpful introduction to any who study children and childhood in the ancient world. In addition, the volume will be of interest to experts who are engaged in historical approaches to biblical studies, while appreciating how the ancient world continues to illuminate select topics in biblical texts.

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Reading Ancient Children

Edited by Shawn W. Flynn

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Foreword

It is with great excitement that I present this volume. There has been some amazing work on the topic of children in the Bible and the ancient world. To understand children's lives more effectively, comparative methods, and specifically historical and material approaches, have much to offer. In response to a developing and emerging field where methods are in flux, this volume gathers an international and diverse group of scholars already fostering this new area of research, but who share a broadly common approach rooted in a historical focus. For the first time, scholars who focus on a common method explore how historically informed reading methods contribute to understanding ancient children, and the biblical texts that employ them.

The contributors in this volume cover the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament in their respective comparative contexts, with other areas of expertise to supplement the discussion. Contributors are from Belgium, Germany, the USA, and Canada. They have been selected both for their common method, breadth of international coverage, and because they have already contributed monograph-length studies on the topic under examination for Cambridge University Press, Eisenbrauns, Oxford University Press, Brill, de Gruyter, etc. This volume now places their contributions in conversation across the various texts they study, thus highlighting similarities in their shared method(s). I need not summarize each of the contributions here, as these colleagues have already offered an abstract at the start of their essays.

To address the challenges of disunity that often comes with edited collections, I have introduced a few structural elements to give the volume coherence while maintaining its breadth. First, contributors have been carefully selected due to the tendency in their reading methods and their sympathy for the questions of history. Most essays demonstrate that the historical contexts are essential to understanding children. Second, contributors were invited into one of three broad categories before beginning their work for this project: children in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East, children in Christian writings and the Greco-Roman world, children and materiality. Therefore, areas of study that tend to be separate, Hebrew Bible versus New Testament for example, are gathered into one study and linked by a common method. Third, contributors have been encouraged to write to their specialty,

but in such a way that an expert in another similar area can follow their argument. Fourth, most of those selected have already been working together in this area for some time, and are in most cases familiar with each other's work.

In particular, the volume also adds one dimension that has been absent: biological anthropology with a forensic expertise in ancient children's bones. Thus one essay, in the third part titled 'Children and material culture,' is a feature of the volume and is given extra space in the collection due to its unique contribution. It matches the historical focus of the others, but extends beyond literature into a specific type of material culture. While children's importance in ancient societies is certainly captured in the biblical literature of the other contributions, the question of children's importance is particularly focused in this feature essay engaging the material data from St Stephen's in Jerusalem. I distinctly remember the grave complex at St Stephen's, having been there many times while on a research visit on the same grounds. As Sheridan introduces, it is surprising that, given all the studies on the early Christian community in Jerusalem, and the amazing grave complex just outside of the old city, children are never discussed—despite the fact that they make up one-third of the 15,000+ remains in those graves. This study in bioarcheology captures what many of these contributors face in their work: children are usually never considered important in research. Sheridan's article is a fitting symbol for how the study of children has often been ignored in past scholarship, and how Sheridan and these colleagues are correcting this gap.

Another unique addition is the final essay. It is not historical like the others, but looks back to an ancient text from a more contemporary vantage point, to understand the importance of the child, in this case the female child. Female children are often given less attention in the historical material. The essay thus studies the female child, and, like the growth of this discipline, studies female maturity in conversation with an ancient text. This essay reminds us how other methods can speak to the historical question of children's value. Thus as a collection, anthropological and scientific data merge with historical-literary expertise of the other contributors to form a convincing picture of how important children were to ancient cultures, even if that value differs from how we express a child's value today.

Finally, the bibliography selectively gathers secondary literature from the contributors, and organizes those resources into relevant categories as a help to future researchers. With thanks to Allan Wright and Dan Shutt for their editing skills.

Steps forward for the field

Beyond structural details to create a helpful collection, what is the ultimate contribution to our field of yet another edited collection? Primarily, this volume joins the general trend that communicates the benefits of this emerging field to the study of biblical texts and beyond. Thanks to all the work done, and the multiple monographs, studies, and conferences over the past

ten years, when children appear in an ancient text the data is now clear that children's roles cannot be ignored, and children play an important role in understanding those texts. To focus on children is not simply an alternate reading method, but, from a historical perspective, the role of children is often an interpretive lynchpin for ancient texts. When a child is mentioned, we now know this comes with a whole complex of cultural assumptions and a cultural matrix that the authors may be using to make a larger point. In the references to children, ancient authors sometimes repeat the common cultural assumptions about children, sometimes they challenge those assumptions towards a larger end, and at other times children are used as a foil for some other purpose. Reflecting on the past ten years of this field and this volume in particular, mounting evidence shows that children are a key feature when utilized in an ancient text. These essays also show that children had a particular type of value. Children had economic, domestic, and even cultic value to the households in which they resided. Combined with high infant mortality rates, children were important to ancient peoples, and their texts reflected—and sometimes utilized—this reality.

I suggest that these contributors, including their past work, add a new consideration for studies of the Bible and other ancient texts. The mounting work on children in ancient cultures uncovers what might best be termed a new genre. When children are part of the biblical text, the cultural assumptions about them are likely being leveraged by biblical texts to say something. Thus the appearance of children in biblical texts should make the interpreter pause and consider the function of the child/children in the text. If this is a genre, interpreters will need to contend with the literature on children in the biblical text and can no longer ignore children when texts choose to include them.

Thus for my simple task of introducing these essays, I would like readers to consider biblical children as a new genre. That is, the growing amount of secondary literature, no matter the nuances of what it claims to do,¹ all accomplishes a common task: it makes us consider the biblical texts through a new lens, and sometimes challenges traditional readings because of the function of children in those texts.

Note

- 1 Shawn W. Flynn, 'Children in the Hebrew Bible: A Field in Growth,' *Religion Compass* (2018): 1–11.

Abbreviations

AfO	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
Alex.	Lucian, Alexander
ANET	Ancient Near East texts
AP	<i>Anthologia Palatina</i>
BADG	Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich (Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament)
BASORSup	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research Supplements</i>
BZAW	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CIL	Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> (Berlin 1893–)
CLE	<i>Carmina Latina Epigraphica</i>
Contr.	Seneca, <i>Controversia</i>
COS	context of scripture
Dial.	Lucian, <i>Dialogi Meretricum</i>
EANEC	explorations in Ancient Near Eastern civilizations
Epist.	Pliny, <i>Epistula</i>
Eun.	Lucian, <i>Eunuchus</i>
FGrH	<i>Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i>
Gram.	Suetonius, <i>De Grammaticis</i>
HSM	<i>Harvard Semitic Monographs</i>
HTThKAT	<i>Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
Inst	Quintilian, <i>Institutio Oratoria</i>
JANER	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JPS	<i>Jewish Publication Society</i>
JSOTSup	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series</i>

KTU	<i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartin. AOAT 24/1. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976. 2d enlarged ed. of <i>KTU: The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places</i> (CTU). Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartin. Münster, 1995
LCL	<i>Lobe Classical Library</i>
LHBOTS	<i>Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies</i>
LNTS	<i>Library of New Testament Studies</i>
<i>Or.</i>	Aristides, <i>Oratio</i>
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
RB	<i>Review Biblique</i>
RBS	resources for biblical study
<i>Sat.</i>	Petronius, <i>Satyricon</i>
SEL	<i>Studi Epigrafici E Linguistici</i>
<i>Symp.</i>	Lucian, <i>Symposium</i>
TAPA	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
TUAT	<i>Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments</i>
UF	<i>Ugarit Forschungen</i>
VAT	tablets in the collections of the Staatliche Museen, Berlin.
<i>Vita Sophist.</i>	<i>Vita Sophistarum Philostratus</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	<i>Vetus Testamentum Supplements</i>
WAW	writings from the Ancient world
YBC	<i>Yale Babylonian Collection</i>
YOS	<i>Yale Oriental Series</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Part I

Children in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East



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1 Vows and children in the Hebrew Bible

Heath D. Dewrell

Vows were an important aspect of religious life in ancient Israel, as well as in the broader Northwest Semitic world. In the Hebrew Bible, vows appear in virtually every major genre of biblical literature. In narrative, characters make vows to God (Gen 28:20; 31:13; Judg 11:30; 1 Sam 1:11; 2 Sam 15:7–8; Jonah 1:6). Several biblical ‘laws’ are devoted to vows (Lev 7:16; 22:21–25; Num 6:1–21; 15:1–10; 30:1–15; Deut 23:18). Vows frequently appear in the Psalms (22:26 [Eng 22:25]; 50:14; 56:13 [Eng 56:12]; 61:6, 9 [Eng 61:5, 8]; 65:2 [Eng 65:1]; 66:13; 76:12 [Eng 76:11]; 116:14, 18; 132:2). In their oracles, the Hebrew prophets address vows (Isa 19:21; Jer 44:25–26; Nah 2:1; Mal 1:14). Vows even appear as topics of discussion in the usually less ritually focused ‘wisdom’ literature of the Hebrew Bible (Job 22:27; Prov 31:2; Ecc 5:3–4 [Eng 5:4–5]). Outside the Hebrew Bible, ‘vows’ appear in texts written in Old Aramaic (*KAI* 201); Official Aramaic (Sam 15); Palmyrene (PAT 1677); Phoenician (*KAI* 18); Punic (*KAI* 88; 103); and Ugaritic (on which, see below).¹

In his seminal study of ancient Near Eastern vows, Tony W. Cartledge defines a vow (Hebrew *neder/nēder*) as ‘a conditional promise, made within the context of petitionary prayer, that the individual will give to God some gift or service in return for God’s willingness to hear and answer [one’s] prayer.’² Further, as Jacques Berlinerblau observes, vows do not appear to have required the mediation of a priest, or even a shrine, and thus provide a window into ‘popular religious practice.’ While some of the laws of the Torah attempt to regulate and standardise vows (Lev 7:16; 22:21–25; Num 6:1–21; 15:1–10; 30:1–15; Deut 23:18), it appears that, in practice, it was entirely up to the individual what to promise, what to request, and when and in what manner to fulfill a vow. Unlike many aspects of the Israelite cult, vows were not restricted to certain genders or classes of people. Anyone could make a vow. Thus, vows provide the historian of the Israelite religion with an uncommon glimpse into the way in which individuals directly interacted with their god(s).³

Another interesting aspect of vows is their nakedly transactional nature. While there are indications that the intended result of firstfruit offerings, for example, was a bountiful harvest, the transactional nature of these offerings is not explicitly stated. Firstfruit offerings are never presented as optional or conditional; they were owed to Yahweh as his share of the harvest (Exod 23:19;

34:26; Deut 18:4). While in practice firstfruit offerings could be conceived of as being of a *do ut des* ('I give so that you will give') variety, the transaction is masked as an unconditional gift offered to Yahweh, to which Yahweh in turn freely responds with divine blessings. In no way, however, do firstfruit offerings *obligate* Yahweh to act. In the case of a vow, on the other hand, the promised item is only delivered to the god(s) *after* the god or goddess has done her or his part. As George Foote Moore observed over a century ago, vows are not even of the *do ut des* variety; they are instead more accurately *dabo si dederis* ('I will give *if* you will give') offerings.⁴ If the deity fails to deliver, then the suppliant is none the worse for having made the vow.

Thus, vows represent both one of the most unmediated aspects of the Israelite cult, in that no cultic functionary is necessary to intercede between the individual who makes the vow and his or her god, and one of the most explicit in terms of its intended purpose and function. In contrast to other sorts of offerings, which tend to draw on relationship language, a vow assumes that the deity can be convinced to act via the promise of a gift (a less pious writer might even say 'bribed') and does nothing to soften or disguise this practical reality. It is entirely comprehensible, then, that vows often appear in the context of crises, especially crises of a personal nature. When all else has failed, one has little to lose by promising the gods some extravagant gift should they deign to intervene. It is likewise no surprise that vows often involved the most personal of objects—children. While in theory one could make a vow regarding nearly any desired thing, children and vows appear in conjunction with one another in some especially interesting ways. In some cases, individuals requested children from the gods and vowed some precious object in return. In other cases, a person may promise to offer one child in exchange for more children. In still others, a person may vow a child in exchange for some other material benefit. The essay below will sketch the variety of ways in which children and vows intersect in Northwest Semitic societies, especially focusing on the religious practice of ancient Israel as attested in the Hebrew Bible.

Children as the object requested

The first case in which children and vows intersect is perhaps the most obvious one: when the suppliant requests a child in exchange for some promised item. Even today in developed Western societies it is not uncommon for individuals to respond to infertility by attempting to bargain with God,⁵ and it is not surprising that the ancients—most of whom believed that supernatural beings interacted with humans in a more concrete and direct way than most modern Westerners assume—did so as well. Unfortunately, while it is likely that making vows in response to childlessness was a fairly common phenomenon in the ancient Near East, descriptions of such acts of personal piety do not often make their way into texts. The most explicit description of a vow made in the hope of obtaining children is preserved in the literature from

Ugarit, specifically the Kirta epic. The tale opens with a report that Kirta's wife and children have all perished by various ghastly means. When Kirta enters his chamber and weeps, the god Ilu comes to him and asks what it is that is distressing him and what it is that he desires. Kirta rejects the idea that kingship or wealth would provide him any consolation. Instead, he cries out:

[<i>tn.</i>] <i>bnm. 'aqny'</i>	[Allow that] I will acquire/produce children!
[<i>tn.</i> <i>θ'a</i>] <i>rm. 'am'id</i>	[Allow that] I will multiply k[in]!

(KTU³ 1.14.ii:4–5)⁶

In response, Ilu instructs Kirta to make a series of sacrifices before preparing for a journey to Udum with his armies. Once there, he is to request the hand of the daughter of a certain King Pabuli—one Huraya—as his wife. During his journey to Udum, Kirta stops at the shrine of Athiratu at Tyre and makes the following vow:

<i>'iθt. 'aθrt. ṣrm</i>	O, as Athiratu of the Tyrians
<i>w'ilt. ṣdynm</i>	and the goddess of the Sidonians exists:
<i>hm. ḥry. bty</i>	If Huraya to my house
<i>'iqh. 'aš'rb. ḡlmt</i>	I take, and I cause the lass to enter
<i>ḥzry. θnh. k'spm</i>	my court. Double her (weight in?) silver
<i>'atn. w. θlθth. ḥrṣm</i>	I will give, and triple her (weight in?) gold.

(KTU³ 1.14.iv:38–43)

While in its most literal and technical sense the vow here concerns Kirta's desire to marry Huraya and never explicitly mentions children, the remainder of the tale reveals that Huraya was essentially a means to the end of obtaining children. Once Kirta has married Huraya, Ilu blesses his family and Huraya bears him two sons and six daughters. This takes seven years' time to accomplish. At the end of the seven years, the text makes clear that it is the children, and not merely Huraya herself, that were the desired objects of Kirta's vow:

<i>mk. bšb'. šnt</i>	Now in seven years
<i>bn. krt. kmhm. tdr</i>	the sons of Kirta were like they were vowed
<i>apbnt. ḥry</i>	also the daughters of Huraya
<i>kmhm.</i>	like them.

(KTU³ 1.15.iii:22–25a)

While there has been some debate about precisely whose vow is referenced here (Kirta's?⁸ Ilu's?⁹), it is likely no coincidence that it is immediately following the birth of Kirta's last child that his vow to Athiratu reappears:

<i>wḥṣs. 'aθrt</i>	And Athiratu remembered
<i>ndrh. w'ilt. d[pl'ih]</i>	his vow. And the goddess what [he promised her?]

(KTU³ 1.15.iii:25b–26)

Athiratu is none too pleased that Kirta neglected to fulfill his end of the bargain and strikes him with some sort of illness as a result. This illness, its ramifications, and how to overcome it serve as the driving plot device for most of the remainder of the epic (or at least what is preserved of it).

As Simon Parker perceptively observed,¹⁰ Kirta's vow has a nice parallel in the story of Hannah's vow in 1 Samuel. Unlike Kirta, however, who was attempting to replace a family that he had lost, Hannah had thus far been unable to conceive a child at all. Then, during her family's regular pilgrimage to the shrine at Shiloh:

She vowed a vow (*wattidōr neder*) and said, 'Yahweh of Hosts, if you will look upon the affliction of your maidservant and will remember me and not forget your maidservant and give to your maidservant the seed of men, then I will give him to Yahweh all the days of his life, and a razor will not touch his head.'

(1 Sam 1:11)

Here, unlike in the case of Kirta, Hannah explicitly names a child as the object that she desires. Nonetheless, there still seems to be something left unsaid. That is, the vow as stated offers no material benefit to Hannah. While Kirta promised to give gold and silver (in the form of a statue?) to Athiratu in exchange for a wife (and children), Hannah asks for a child but promises to give the child right back to Yahweh. Why go through the discomfort—and, in the ancient world, even danger—of pregnancy and childbirth just to hand the child over?

Here, examining ancient assumptions about the female reproductive system may be of some help. The most common term for female infertility in the Hebrew Bible is *'āqārā*, probably cognate to $\sqrt{qr}$, 'to uproot,'¹¹ and indicating that the woman's womb is a place in which the man's 'seed' cannot take root. Another semantic field used in reference to female infertility, however, is language concerning an 'open' or 'closed' womb. For example, in Genesis 29–30, Rachel is said to be 'barren' (*'āqārā*), but regarding Leah, Yahweh is said to have 'opened her womb' (*wayyiptaḥ et-rahmāh*; 29:31). Later, God remembers Rachel and likewise 'opens her womb' (again, *wayyiptaḥ et-rahmāh*; 30:22). Similarly, in the second of Genesis's 'endangered matriarch' stories, Yahweh 'restrains/locks up' (*'āṣar*) the wombs of the women in the house of Abimelech (20:17–18). Notably, this is quite similar to the description of Hannah's infertility: 'Yahweh had closed (*sāgar*) her womb' (1 Sam 1:5–6). A different lexeme is employed, but the assumptions expressed concerning female fertility are identical.¹²

Further, the assumption appears to have been that once a child was born, a woman's womb was now permanently 'open' unless Yahweh 'closed' it. When Yahweh opens Leah's womb, she bears Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah in quick succession (Gen 29:31–35). Likewise, after God opens Rachel's womb (Gen 30:22) there is no mention of a second 'womb opening' before

she conceives Benjamin (Gen 35:16–18). Once a womb was open, apparently it did not need reopening for each successive child. Indeed, one common synonym for ‘firstborn’ (*bēkôr*) is *peter rehem*, ‘breach of a womb.’ This language suggests that a firstborn child was understood as opening a woman’s womb, and thus cleared the way for subsequent children. Secondary infertility (the inability to conceive after a previous pregnancy), while not uncommon physiologically,¹³ does not appear to have played a prominent role in Israelite conceptions of reproduction.

All this is to say that Hannah’s vow to give the child back to Yahweh makes sense if one assumes, as an ancient hearer or reader would have, that she could have reasonably expected more children to follow upon the first one. Indeed, that is precisely what happens; after her dedication of Samuel, when Hannah would join her family on their annual pilgrimage to Shiloh in subsequent years, Eli would invoke a blessing over Hannah:

Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife and said, ‘May Yahweh set for you seed from this woman in return for the request which he(!)¹⁴ asked of Yahweh.’ Then they went to his place. Yet Yahweh visited Hannah, and she bore three sons and two daughters. But the lad Samuel grew up with Yahweh.
(1 Sam 2:20–21)

Just as in the case of Kirta’s vow, Hannah did not explicitly ask for children. Kirta asked for Huraya as a wife, and Hannah asked for a single child. The ultimate (and entirely predictable) result of each vow, however, was that multiple children were born, and it stands to reason that these children were the true aim of each vow.

Unfortunately, narratives that involve vows in exchange for children are rare in the extant corpus of Northwest Semitic literature. There are indications, however, that the practice was more common than our literary sources might indicate. For instance, in Prov 31:2, King Lemuel’s mother refers to him both as ‘son of my belly’ (*ben biṭnī*) and ‘son of my vows’ (*ben nēdārāy*), probably indicating that he was born by means of divine assistance in response to a vow. Likewise, many personal names appear to indicate that the so-named child was specifically requested, also possibly via a vow. See, for example, *Šā’ûl*, ‘asked/requested,’¹⁵ *Šē’altī’ēl*, ‘I asked God,’¹⁶ and the many names built on the root *√šm*, ‘to hear,’ including *Šēma’yāhû* / *Yišma’yā(hû)* / (*Yē*)*hōšāma*, ‘Yahweh has heard,’¹⁷ *Yišma’ēl* / *Elīšāmā*, ‘(My) God/El has heard,’¹⁸ and various other personal names having to do with ‘hearing,’ including *Šim’î*,¹⁹ *Šammû(a)*,²⁰ *Šāmā*,²¹ and *Šim’ā*.²² One might also point to names built on the idea that God has ‘given’ the child, such as *Yēhônātān*,²³ *’Ēlnātān*,²⁴ *Nētanyāhû*,²⁵ and *Nētan’ēl*.²⁶ Of course, none of these names absolutely requires understanding the child as having been conceived as the result of a vow, but the frequency with which Israelite personal names involve verbs of ‘asking,’ ‘hearing,’ and ‘giving’ is suggestive nonetheless. At the very least, Israelite personal names reveal that Yahweh was understood as intimately involved in the conception

and birth of children, and one way to get Yahweh to act favorably in this regard was via a vow.

Thus, despite the relative dearth of narrative material describing making vows in exchange for a child, there is circumstantial evidence that making vows to obtain children made up a common aspect of Israelite family religion. If one desired a child, then making a vow to one's god(s) was an obvious option. As with all vows, payment of the promised item would only be required in the case of the petitioner's request's being granted, so vows were a relatively risk-free strategy for imploring divine aid.

Children as the object vowed

Promising something in return for a child is not the only manner in which children and vows intersected in the ancient world. There is evidence, both biblical and extrabiblical, that children could also serve as the item promised in a vow. While offering one child in exchange for other children, as Hannah did, may make some sense from the detached perspective of basic arithmetic, in other cases children were offered in exchange for other sorts of goods and benefits, which is less easily comprehensible for most of us today. Offering to trade a human being for a material object involves the sort of valuation of human life in financial terms that is foreign and even taboo in most modern Western societies (save, of course, insurance actuarial tables). In the ancient world, however, there is good evidence that trading a child for another material benefit was not beyond the realm of imagination. Further, while Samuel was dedicated to service at the shrine at Shiloh, another mechanism for fulfilling the vow of a child was via the sacrifice of the child.²⁷

For instance, in the Punic colonies of the central Mediterranean, we find stelae that apparently commemorate the sacrifice of children to the Punic deities Baʿl ḥammon and Tanit in fulfillment of vows. While the precise wording of the inscriptions varies, a nice example comes from Constantine, Algeria and reads:

*lʾdn lbʿl ḥmn mlk
ʾdm ndr ʾš ndr bʿlpdʾ
bn mgn šmʾ qlʾ
brkʾ*

To the Lord, to Baʿl Ḥammon: a *mulk*-sacrifice
of a human, a vow which Baʿlpadaʾ
son of Magon vowed. He [Baʿl Ḥammon] heard
his voice;
he blessed him.

(RES 339)²⁸

Here a certain Baʿlpadaʾ had made a vow to Baʿl Ḥammon, and Baʿl Ḥammon has positively answered Baʿlpadaʾ's request. Now, Baʿlpadaʾ has not only fulfilled his vow and offered his child as a *mulk*-sacrifice, but he has additionally erected a stela to commemorate the occasion. It is only thanks to this stela that we have any record of the vow at all, so it is convenient for modern historians that Baʿlpadaʾ took this extra step. Otherwise, there would be no record of the

vow at all. Further, it is only thanks to stelae such as this one that we are able to identify the fields of urns containing the cremated remains of infants (and sometimes sheep) attested across the Punic central Mediterranean as sacred precincts—referred to as ‘tophets’ in scholarly discussion—in which children were sacrificed. That Ba‘lpada’ was not exceptional in commemorating the fulfillment of his vow and the sacrifice of the child via a stele is attested by the dozens of similar stele found in similar contexts throughout the Punic colonies.²⁹

At least one classical writer, Kleitarchos, confirms the witness of these stelae:

The Phoenicians, and above all the Carthaginians, venerating Kronos, whenever they were eager for a great thing to succeed, made a vow by one of their children. If they would receive the desired things, they would sacrifice it to the god. A bronze Kronos, having been erected by them, stretched out upturned hands over a bronze oven to burn the child. The flame of the burning child reached its body until, the limbs having shriveled up and the smiling mouth appearing to be almost laughing, it would slip into the oven.³⁰

While other classical authors, such as Diodorus Siculus³¹ and Philo of Byblos,³² depict Punic and Phoenician child sacrifice as having taken place in the context of great national emergencies, Kleitarchos’s presentation of the rite as connected with personal vows jibes much better with the native testimony of the stelae. The archeological evidence from Carthage and elsewhere would indicate that the children who were vowed were likely not yet born when the vow was uttered, as the remains in the urns from the tophets overwhelmingly come from very young infants.³³ Unfortunately, neither the Punic stelae nor Kleitarchos provides us with any concrete information concerning what types of ‘great things’ the Punic colonists had in mind when they made such vows, but given the individual nature of the vows it does appear that they concerned issues of a personal nature rather than events at a national scale.

Turning to ancient Israel, it is significant that the Israelites are also said to have offered sacrifices identified by the term *mulk/mōlek*. Although the traditional understanding (which admittedly does continue to have its adherents) held that biblical *mōlek* was a deity named ‘Molech’ to whom children were sacrificed, nearly a century ago Otto Eissfeldt argued that the children who are said to have been sacrificed ‘*lam-mōlek*’ were actually offered not ‘to Molek,’ but ‘as a *mōlek*-sacrifice,’ presumably to Yahweh. Eissfeldt’s primary piece of evidence was the Punic sacrifices with the same name noted above.³⁴ That is, the Punic *mulk*-sacrifices and the Israelite *mōlek*-sacrifices were one and the same. So, for example, when Lev 18:21 commands, ‘You will not give any of your “seed” to pass over *lam-mōlek*; you will not defile the name of your God. I am Yahweh,’ the Hebrew phrase *lam-mōlek* should not be understood as ‘to [the god] Molech,’ as it traditionally has been. Rather, it should be read ‘as

a *mōlek*-sacrifice,' a term designating a particular type of offering—one that apparently involved the sacrifice of children (i.e., 'your seed').

Further, like the Punic *mulk*-sacrifices, biblical *mōlek*-sacrifices are said to have involved burning the child. For instance, when Josiah defiled the site of these rituals, called a tophet, 2 Kgs 23:10 says that he did so, 'so that a man may not pass over his son or his daughter *in fire* as a *mōlek*-sacrifice.' Thus, it would appear that not only did the Punic and Israelite sacrifices have the same name and share in common that children often served as the victims of the sacrifice, but the mechanism for offering the child was via fire in both cases. This raises the question of whether one can surmise that the two rites also served the same function. That is, did biblical *mōlek*-sacrifices take place in the context of vows in the same way that they did in the apparently cognate rites from the Punic central Mediterranean?

Unfortunately, the various traditions preserved in the Hebrew Bible show little interest in elaborating on the function of *mōlek*-sacrifices; the biblical writers are more concerned with condemning these sacrifices than describing their intended purpose. Despite repeated condemnations of the rites in a variety of biblical traditions, in no case does the Hebrew Bible give us any clear information concerning why those who offered *mōlek*-sacrifices did so. While one might suggest that the Punic evidence is sufficient to conclude that Israelite *mōlek*-sacrifices had the same purpose as the identically named rites from the central Mediterranean, filling in gaps in our data concerning one society's rituals with information about similar rites in another society necessarily carries us into the realm of conjecture to one degree or another.

As I observe in a forthcoming article,³⁵ however, there may well be native corroboration for the idea that the *mōlek*-sacrifices mentioned in the Hebrew Bible also involved vows. The book of Zephaniah opens with a declaration of condemnation followed by a litany of allegations concerning cultic violations that the inhabitants of Jerusalem have committed. Among these is an enigmatic claim that they were 'swearing to Yahweh and swearing by their king (MT *malḵām*)' (Zeph 1:5b). This phrase has proven difficult for interpreters. Who is 'their king,' and what is wrong with swearing by him? Commentators have suggested identifying 'their king' as some non-Yahwistic deity; Baal is a popular suggestion.³⁶ Others point to the versions, some of which read either 'Milcom,'³⁷ the god of the Ammonites, or 'Molek,'³⁸ assuming (erroneously in my view) that Molek was a divine name. Even so, why would anyone make an oath to Yahweh in the name of another deity? Surely Yahweh could take care of enforcing his own oaths, even among those who venerated more than one god.

It is likely the case that the difficulty here is occasioned by a mispointing of the text. I suggest that the text would have originally read *bē-molakīm* [*mēlākīm* according to the Tiberian vocalization]—that is, by means of *mōlek*-sacrifices. Thus the oracle accuses the inhabitants of Jerusalem of making vows to Yahweh that involved offering *mōlek*-sacrifices of children. Later, after *mōlek*-sacrifices had ceased to be offered in Jerusalem and their function

had long been forgotten, readers came to understand Hebrew *mlkm* as ‘their king,’ which explains the Masoretic pointing. Originally, however, Zephaniah would have been accusing the inhabitants of making illicit vows to Yahweh that were fulfilled via the sacrifice of children.

Thus, *mōlek*-sacrifices in Jerusalem not only bore the same name, involved the same victim (i.e., a child), and were offered via the same mechanism (i.e., fire) as the rites attested in the Punic colonies of the central Mediterranean, but they also appear to have served a similar function. Israelite *mōlek*-sacrifices involved the sacrifice of children in fulfillment of vows in exchange for some divinely granted favor. Not only could one request a child via a vow, children could also be among the items promised to be delivered over to the deity (via sacrifice) if the petitioner received what she or he requested. While the Hebrew Bible repeatedly condemns such rites, these very condemnations are evidence that the practice was widespread enough to warrant condemning.

Conclusion

Vows were among the most personal and direct ways in which an individual could interact with her or his god. Unmediated by a priest or a shrine and nakedly transactional in nature, vows allowed a person to approach a deity directly and even to bargain with the divine. Given the personal nature of vows, it should come as no surprise that children, the most personal of items, also appear in the context of vows. The making of vows was a way to persuade the god(s) to grant a child to an infertile family, as both narrative material and personal names like *Šā’ûl*, ‘requested,’ attest. On the other hand, however, children could also appear as the item promised in a vow. While Hannah’s promise to give Samuel back to Yahweh was carried out by dedicating him to service at the shrine at Shiloh, in other cases children were sacrificed in fulfillment of vows. Called *mōlek* in the Hebrew Bible, the sacrifice of one’s own child was promised to persuade the god(s) to intervene on one’s behalf. While the Hebrew Bible repeatedly condemns these rites, the evidence from both the Hebrew Bible and the cognate evidence from the Punic colonies demonstrate that children could be promised to the gods, just as they could be requested from them, via a vow.

Notes

- 1 The list of texts cited here is intended to be illustrative, not exhaustive. For a more thorough collection of Northwest Semitic inscriptions containing references to ‘vows,’ see the entry for *ndr*₁ in *DNSWI* 717–719.
- 2 Tony W. Cartledge, *Vows in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 25.
- 3 Jacques Berlinerblau, *The Vow and the ‘Popular Religious Groups’ of Ancient Israel: A Philological and Sociological Inquiry* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

- 4 George Foote Moore, 'Vows, Votive Offerings,' *Encyclopedia Biblica* 4 (London: Black, 1903), 5253; quoted in Cartledge, *Vows in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 28.
- 5 For instance, Millicent C. Feske describes the response of one woman to her unexplained infertility:

One woman who had left Catholicism, to join her husband's United Methodist congregation, wrote that, "After a while I remember at one point, I went back to the Catholic Church for instruction because I thought maybe God was ticked off because I wasn't a practicing Catholic anymore. So I took the instructions, and I tried to get back to the devout Catholic role that I had as a young child. ... You come to that ... You come to the almost desperate situation of trying to think that maybe this is the thing that will do it. Maybe a little more work in the community, maybe whatever".

('Rachel's Lament: The Impact of Infertility and Pregnancy Loss upon the Religious Faith of Ordinary Christians,' *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 22 [2012]: 3-1-3-17)

- Likewise, Arthur L. Greil, Karen L. Porter, Thomas A. Leitko, and Catherine Riscilli quote another woman struggling with infertility: 'I spent a few months working to get God on my side. I did the novenas and I spent lengthy periods of time at night, before I went to bed. I made little bargains, like, "If you let me get pregnant this month, I promise this"' ('Why Me?: Theodicies of Infertile Women and Men,' *Sociology of Health & Illness* 11 [1989]: 219. See also Robab Latifnejad Roudsari, Helen T. Allan, and Pam A. Smith, 'Looking at Infertility through the Lens of Religion and Spirituality: A Review of the Literature,' *Human Fertility* 10 [2007]: 144).
- 6 Restorations here, and in the other excerpts below, follow Edward L. Greenstein, 'Kirta,' in *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (ed. Simon B. Parker; WAW 9; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), 9-48. Translations, although informed by those of others, are my own.
 - 7 So H.L. Ginsberg, *The Legend of King Keret: A Canaanite Epic of the Bronze Age* (BASORSup 2-3; New Haven, CT: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1946), 40; Simon B. Parker, 'The Vow in Israelite and Ugaritic Narrative Literature,' *UF* 11 (1979): 694; *idem*, *The Pre-Biblical Narrative Tradition: Essays on the Ugaritic Poems of Keret and Aqhat* (RBS 24; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 74-75; Manfred Dietrich and Oswalt Loretz, 'Das Keret-Epos,' *TUAT* 3:6 1229; Dennis Pardee, 'The Kirta Epic,' *COS* 1.102 336; Herbert Niehr, 'Texte aus Syrien,' *TUAT*² 8 249. Pointing to an apparent parallel in which Puduḥepa, the wife of Hittite King Ḫattušili III, vows a statue of Ḫattušili to Lelwani in exchange for divine aid (*ANET*³ 394), Parker (followed by most others) suggests that Kirta's promised gold and silver would have been in the form of a statue of Huraya (*The Pre-Biblical Narrative Tradition*, 74-75). Alternatively, Greenstein suggests that this statue would have been 'two-thirds overlaid with silver, a third with gold' ('Kirta,' 43-44).
 - 8 So Parker, 'The Vow in Israelite and Ugaritic Narrative Literature,' 695; Ginsberg, *The Legend of King Keret*, 23, 41. Noting the incongruence between Kirta's vow in exchange for a wife and Athiratu's anger upon the birth of his children, Ginsberg suggests that the vow here must have been a different vow than the one mentioned earlier in the extant portions of the epic (KTU³ 1.14.iv:38-43) and that this second vow must have been described in a now-lost section of the text (*The Legend of King Keret*, 23, 41). Given, however, that the impetus for seeking to wed Huraya was Kirta's desire for children, one can safely assume that Kirta, Athiratu, and the

- reader would have naturally understood Kirta's vow as a request for children, as well as for a wife. Thus, introducing a second vow is unnecessary.
- 9 So Dietrich and Loretz, *TUAT* 3.4 1236 n. 155; Pardee, *COS* 1.102 338.
 - 10 Parker, 'The Vow in Israelite and Ugaritic Narrative Literature,' 693–700; *idem*, *The Pre-Biblical Narrative Tradition*, 70–87, esp. 77–78.
 - 11 For a discussion of the root, see H.-J. Fabry, 'רָקַע *'āqar*; רָקַע *'āqār*; רָקַע *'ēqer*; רָקַע *'iqqār*,' *TDOT* 11 320–326.
 - 12 For present purposes, it is unimportant whether fertility or infertility was seen as the 'normal' reproductive state—that is, whether infertility was viewed as a 'disability' or whether instead fertility was seen as a special divine blessing. Most have argued that infertility was perceived as the abnormal condition, i.e., as a disability. See Hector Avalos, *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East: The Role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia, and Israel*, HSM 54 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), 331–334; Jeremy Schipper, 'Disabling Israelite Leadership: 2 Samuel 6:23 and Other Images of Disability in the Deuteronomistic History,' in *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disability in Biblical Studies* (ed. Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper; SemeiaSt 55; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 105; Rebecca Raphael, *Biblical Corpora: Representations of Disability in Hebrew Biblical Literature*, LHBOTS 445 (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 57–58. For the contrary view (i.e., that infertility was understood as a 'normal' state, at least for some women), see Joel Baden, 'The Nature of Barrenness in the Hebrew Bible,' in *Disability Studies in Biblical Literature* (ed. Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper; New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 13–27.
 - 13 Secondary infertility is actually the most common form of female infertility worldwide (Marcia C. Inhorn and Pasquale Patrizio, 'Infertility around the Globe: New Thinking on Gender, Reproductive Technologies and Global Movements in the 21st Century,' *Human Reproduction Update* 21 [2015]: 413–414).
 - 14 So MT *š'l*, but almost certainly erroneously so. OG and Vulg reflect Hebrew *hš'lt* 'you have dedicated.' 4QSam^a reads *hš'y[h]* 'she has dedicated.' There is disagreement whether Syr *š'lt* should be understood as a 2ms form, in line with OG and Vulg (so S. Lee, *Vetus Testamentum syriacè* [London: Impensis ejusdem Societatis, 1823]; *idem*, *Vetus Testamentum Syriacè et Neosyriacè* [Urmia, 1852]; and P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 8; Garden City, NY: Doubleday], 80), or a 3fs form, in line with 4QSam^a (so Craig E. Morrison, *The Character of the Syriac Version of Samuel* [Monographs of the Peshitta Institute Leiden 11; Leiden: Brill, 2001], 24). Thus, there is disagreement across the various witnesses concerning the subject of the verb (3ms, 3fs, or 2ms), as well as its *binyan* (G 'ask' versus C 'dedicate'). Happily, this is not the critical portion of the passage for present purposes.
 - 15 Gen 36:37–38//1 Chr 1:48; Gen 46:10//1 Chr 4:24; Exod 6:15; Num 23:16; 1 Sam 9:2 *et passim*; 1 Chr 6:24.
 - 16 Hag 1:1, 12, 14; 2:2, 23; Ezra 3:2, 8; Neh 12:1; 1 Chr 3:17.
 - 17 Jer 26:20; 29:24; 36:12; 1 Chr 3:18; 12:4; 27:19; 2 Chr 11:2; 17:8; 31:15; 35:9.
 - 18 Gen 16:11 *et passim*; Num 1:10; 2:18; 4:48, 53; 10:22; 2 Sam 5:16; 2 Kgs 25:23, 25; Jer 36:12, 20–21; 40:8 *et passim*; Ezra 10:22; 1 Chr 1:28–29, 31; 2:41; 3:6, 8; 7:26; 8:38; 9:44; 14:7; 2 Chr 17:8; 19:11; 23:1.
 - 19 Exod 6:17; Num 3:18; 2 Sam 16:5, 7, 13; 19:17, 19, 22, 24; 21:21; 1 Kgs 1:8; 2:8, 36, 38–42, 44; 4:18; Esth 2:5; Ezra 10:23, 33, 38; 1 Chr 3:19; 4:26–27; 5:4; 6:2, 14, 27; 8:21; 23:7, 9, 17, 27; 29:14; 31:12–13.

- 20 Num 13:4; 2 Sam 5:14; Neh 11:17; 12:18; 1 Chr 14:4.
- 21 1 Chr 11:44.
- 22 1 Chr 2:13; 3:5; 6:16, 24; 20:7.
- 23 Judg 18:30; 1 Sam 14:6 *et passim*; 2 Sam 21:21; 23:32; Jer 37:15, 20, 26; Neh 12:18; 1 Chr 8:33–34; 9:39–40; 20:7; 27:25, 32; 2 Chr 17:8.
- 24 2 Kgs 24:8; Jer 26:22; 36:12, 25; Ezra 8:16.
- 25 Jer 36:14; 40:8; 41:9; 1 Chr 25:12; 2 Chr 17:8.
- 26 Num 1:8; 2:5; 7:19, 23; 10:15, 22; Neh 12:21, 36; 1 Chr 2:14; 15:24; 24:6; 26:4; 2 Chr 17:7; 35:9.
- 27 For a discussion of ancient Israelite child sacrifice in particular, see Heath D. Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice in Ancient Israel* (EANECS 5; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017).
- 28 For a collection of the relevant inscriptions, see Paul G. Mosca, ‘Child Sacrifice in Canaanite and Israelite Religion: A Study in מִלְחָה and מִלְחָה’ (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1975), 56–92. For a discussion of the evolution of the formula of these dedicatory inscriptions over time, see Maria Giulia Amadasi Guzzo and José Ángel Zamora López, ‘The Epigraphy of the Tophet,’ *SEL* 29–30 (2012–2013), 159–192.
- 29 While some have objected to the idea that child sacrifice actually took place in the Punic colonies, the combined weight of the epigraphic, archeological, classical, and biblical evidence indicates the reality of Punic child sacrifice. See especially Paolo Xella, ‘Tophet: An Overall Interpretation,’ *SEL* 29–30 (2012–2013), 259–281. The interested reader may also consult the other contributions to the same volume, which together provide a convenient and thorough overview of the topic of Punic child sacrifice. The bibliography on Punic tophets is vast. For a summary of the evidence, along with an extensive bibliography, see Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice*, 44–50, 70–71.
- 30 *FGrH* 137 F 9. Translation mine.
- 31 *Bibliotheca historica* 20.14.4–6.
- 32 Cited in Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 1.10.44–4.16.11.
- 33 The debate concerning the age of the infants preserved at Carthage in particular has been extensive, largely due to its implications for the reality or lack thereof of Punic child sacrifice. While the cremated infants preserved in urns were originally interpreted to be the victims of child sacrifice, Jeffrey H. Schwartz and his team argued based on their osteological analysis that most of the ‘infant’ remains were actually prenatal fetuses (Jeffrey H. Schwartz, Frank Houton, Roberto Macchiarelli, and Luca Bondioli, ‘Skeletal Remains from Punic Carthage Do Not Support Systematic Sacrifice of Infants,’ *PLoS ONE* 5 [2010]: e9177). Since it is unlikely that stillborn children could be ‘sacrificed,’ they argue that the remains represent mundane burials and that the Carthaginian ‘tophet’ is actually an infant cemetery. This claim has been challenged, however, and others have defended the traditional interpretation, arguing that the osteological evidence actually indicates that the remains belong to very young, but postnatal, infants (see especially P. Smith, G. Avishai, J.A. Greene, and L.E. Stager, ‘Aging Cremated Infants: The Problem of Sacrifice at the Tophet of Carthage,’ *Antiquity* 85 [2011]: 859–872). This rebuttal was met with a rejoinder from Schwartz et al. (J.H. Schwartz, F.D. Houghton, L. Bondioli, and R. Macchiarelli, ‘Bones, Teeth, and Estimating Age of Perinates: Carthaginian Infant Sacrifice Revisited,’ *Antiquity* 86 [2012]: 738–745), which was in turn met with yet another rebuttal

- (Patricia Smith, Lawrence E. Stager, Joseph A. Greene, and Gal Avishai, 'Age Estimations Attest to Infant Sacrifice at the Carthage Tophet,' *Antiquity* 87 [2013]: 1191–1199). Surveying this debate, which appeared to be at an impasse, Valentina Melchiorri argues that a narrow focus on the (apparently ambiguous) data from Carthage improperly ignores data from other Punic tophets from around the central Mediterranean, where the bones have consistently been interpreted as coming from young, but postnatal, infants ('Osteological Analysis in the Study of the Phoenician and Punic Tophet: A History of Research,' *SEL* 29–30 [2012–2013]: 223–258). Likewise, Paolo Xella takes an even broader view and argues that, when taken together, the archeological, epigraphic, classical, and biblical material all point to the reality of Punic child sacrifice ('Tophet: An Overall Interpretation').
- 34 Otto Eissfeldt first suggested this connection in his short but seminal *Molk als Opferbegriff im Punischen und Hebräischen, und das Ende des Gottes Moloch* (Beiträge zur Religionsgeschichte des Altertums 3; Halle [Saale]: Niemeyer, 1935). While the bibliography on the topic since the publication of Eissfeldt's monograph is vast, the most thorough treatment of the topic by a scholar who follows Eissfeldt's thesis is Mosca, 'Child Sacrifice in Canaanite'. Mosca not only ably defends Eissfeldt's argument against its detractors, but also gathers together all the relevant textual material—epigraphic, classical, and biblical—in one convenient place. In recent decades, the Eissfeldt-Mosca thesis fell out of favor, largely due to the notable objections of George C. Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment* (JSOTSup 43; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985) and John Day, *Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 41; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), both of whom argued that there was indeed a deity named 'Molek' who was the recipient of child sacrifices. For a recent defense of the Eissfeldt-Mosca thesis and a rebuttal to the arguments of Heider and Day, see Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice in Ancient Israel*.
 - 35 For a more comprehensive defense of the thesis argued in brief here, see Heath D. Dewrell, '“Swearing to Yahweh, but Swearing by Mōlek-Sacrifices”: Zephaniah 1:5b,' *VT* (forthcoming).
 - 36 So Wilhelm Schulz, *Commentar über den Propheten Zephania* (Hannover: Weichert, 1892), 27–28; Liudger Sabottka, *Zephania: Versuch einer Neuübersetzung mit philologischem Kommentar* (BibOr 25; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1972), 24–25; Arvid S. Kapelrud, *The Message of the Prophet Zephaniah: Morphology and Ideas* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1975), 23–24; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Micah—Nahum—Habakkuk—Zephania*, KAT 13/3, 2nd ed. (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1975), 265–266; A.S. van der Woude, *Habakkuk Zephania*, 2nd ed., POuT (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1985), 92–93; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 264–265; Ambrogio Spreafico, *Sofonia* (CSEANT 38; Genoa: Marietti, 1991), 88–89; J. Vlaardingerbroek, *Zephaniah* (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 69–70; Marvin A. Sweeney, *Zephaniah: A Commentary* (ed. Paul D. Hanson; Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003) 11.
 - 37 So the Lucianic recension, Vulgate, and Peshitta; followed by JPS; NRSV; Luther; BHQ; J.J.M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary*, (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 167–168; Walter Dietrich, *Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah* (trans. Peter Altmann; IECOT; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016), 198, 200.

- 38 So some Greek witnesses and the Akhmimic (Coptic) version; followed by K. Deddens, *Zefanja's Profetieën* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1973), 13, 20; Hubert Irsigler, *Gottesgericht und Jahwetag: Die Komposition Zef 1,1–2,3, untersucht auf der Grundlage der Literarkritik des Zefanjabuches* (Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament 3; St. Ottilien: EOS-Verlag, 1977), 24–35; *idem*, *Zefanja* (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2002), 114–118; Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 25A; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 75–77.

2 Turning birth into theology

Traces of ancient obstetric knowledge within narratives of difficult childbirth in the Hebrew Bible¹

Claudia D. Bergmann

The Hebrew Bible contains several birth narratives that focus on the difficulties experienced by the mothers in regard to conception, pregnancy, labor, and childbirth: the birth of Jacob and Esau by Rebecca (Gen 25:21–26), the birth of Ben-Oni / Ben-Jamin by Rachel (Gen 35:16–19), and the birth of Peretz and Zerah by Tamar (Gen 38:27–30). While these narratives name their protagonists, they do not reflect the experience of these particular historical individuals; rather, they have a different theological purpose and have more than just individual destinies in view.² The authors of these narratives believed that fertility and infertility overcome functioned to confirm God's faithfulness to God's people. Thus, in the individual destiny of these women and children, the destiny of a people is mirrored. But if read between the lines, these birth narratives also give the modern reader information about the gynecological and obstetric knowledge available at the time of their inception. It is the goal of this contribution to investigate the connection between the traces of ancient medical knowledge within these biblical narratives of difficult childbirth and their deeper purpose as envisioned by the authors of the entire narrative about the history of the people Israel.

'She conceived and bore a son': biblical birth narratives and traces of medical knowledge

As was the case in the ancient Near East,³ preserving the individual memories of a mother giving birth or of the attendants at a specific birth event was of little or no importance for the authors of the Hebrew Bible. Their perspective on this event that changes the life of a woman (and has the potential of ending it) and begins the journey through life for the individual being born was one of retrospective and theological evaluation. The dangerous and miraculous circumstances surrounding the conception, pregnancy, birth, and events after the birth, the ancient authors believed, were evidence of greater things: the divine providence and participation in these events and the divine purpose attached to the men being born.

Biblical images for conception and pregnancy

In the Hebrew Bible, the approximately nine-month period before birth can be described through colorful imagery that is usually taken from the context of daily life. Thus, the ability or inability of a woman to conceive can be pictured by the image of the open or closed door;⁴ a common motif in the ancient Near East.⁵ Female infertility is pictured as a locked womb; at the same time, God holds the key to this metaphorical door and can reverse infertility at will. The matriarch Sarah, for example, only conceives after menopause, when both she and her husband have reached old age.⁶ Tamar experiences a different kind of delayed conception. She achieves pregnancy after an unusual case of levirate marriage failed and after having a singular sexual encounter with Judah (Gen 38). The ancient authors of these biblical texts thus attribute the ability to become and remain pregnant to divine favor.⁷

For the concept of conception itself, the authors of the Hebrew Bible use the image of the sowing of seeds: the woman may be just 'fertile ground' that is 'being sown with seed' (Num 5:28) or an active agent that brings forth seed (Lev 12:2).⁸

The details of the gestation period and the length of a pregnancy are rarely a point of discussion in the Hebrew Bible. Psalm 139:13–15 and Job 3:3–4 offer a glimpse at the fetus in the dark surroundings of the uterus that corresponds to the depth of the earth as well as a glimpse into the imaginations of the authors who composed these texts.⁹ In rather poetic imagery, Ps 139:13 and Job 10:11 picture the fetus as being knit into shape by a divine weaver; Job 10:9 shows the unborn child as being made of clay, and Job 10:10 describes the process of gestation as a pouring out of milk and a curdling of milk into cheese. Weaving or knitting, the making of a vessel out of clay, or the making of cheese all are activities based in everyday life and do not necessarily have a basis in particular gynecological knowledge. All of these activities turn nature into culture or, at the very least, turn a basic material into something more sophisticated. They also imply that the authors of these texts believed that something unformed or maybe even liquid (wool, clay, milk) is brought into a definite and solid form (a knit product, a vessel, a piece of cheese).¹⁰

Difficulties experienced during labor and childbirth

As is evident in the ancient Near Eastern literary texts, women in labor and undergoing childbirth were usually attended by other women who provided verbal support and performed a number of procedures that were supposed to both help labor along and protect the lives of mother and child. The ancient Near Eastern childbirth incantations are witness to these activities, in which magical and medical procedures were often intermingled.

In the Hebrew Bible, childbirth incantations similar to the ancient Near Eastern texts do not exist. Childbirth narratives are relatively rare and molded by the theological interests of the authors and by metaphorical speech.¹¹ It

appears that narrating the birth of individuals or narrating the experience of women giving birth is only important in a few cases, namely when an important ancestor is born and the divine grace surrounding his conception, birth, and general survival is of utmost importance to the authors of these texts.¹² The three most important and detailed childbirth narratives that deal with the individual experiences of the mothers giving birth and the children being born are notably clustered in the narratives surrounding the family of Jacob, who is later renamed Israel.¹³

Rebecca, Esau, and Jacob

Rebecca's pregnancy is described as being riddled with difficulties. In Gen 25:21, the ancient authors note that Rebecca is apparently barren and emphasize that she only becomes pregnant after Isaac's prayer and God's intervention. Interestingly, the long conflict between Jacob and Esau narrated in Gen 25–27 finds its first expression *in utero*, as the unborn children kick each other and their mother in Gen 25:22. Rebecca's (and the reader's) question of why this may be so is answered by divine oracular poetry in Gen 25:23, which puts Rebecca's pregnancy into the context of the history of Israel. Tikva Frymer-Kensky writes about the purpose of the oracle:

Rivka, moreover, has devoted her life to the promise. To her, the future of her son is bound up with the promise ... In the case of Rivka, the storyteller relates the oracle to legitimate Rivka's action, to make sure that the readers understand that as tricky as they might be, they are in accord with the word of God.¹⁴

Once the conflict between the brothers is resolved, the authors of the biblical text make sure that both Jacob and Esau are portrayed as the forefathers of great people; Esau's descendancy even encompasses the entire chapter Gen 36.

As characterized by a theological purpose as this narrative might be, it still betrays some medical knowledge as it points to a prepartum diagnosis of the twin pregnancy. In Gen 25:22, Rebecca already seems to know about the twins in her womb as she turns to God for enquiry, which might point to the diagnostic work of an extraordinarily skillful midwife.¹⁵ In the subsequent verse, Gen 25:23, the ancient authors interpret God's answer to Rebecca's question in theological terms. In Gen 25:24, the prepartum diagnosis proves to be correct: twins were delivered.

Rachel and Ben-Oni / Ben-Jamin

Jacob's immediate family has to deal with another case of difficult childbirth, which is again worded in such a way that the reader is pointed to the greater purpose of this story, namely, the narration of the multiplication of Jacob's offspring. Almost immediately after the notice of Rachel's death

during childbirth and her burial—which the ancient authors adorn with no emotional details aside from the renaming of the baby from what his mother had called him (Ben-Oni) to what his father calls him after the death of the mother (Ben-Jamin)—the biblical text continues with the list of Jacob’s sons, of which Ben-Jamin is one of twelve. The meager story of a difficult birth that ends in the death of the mother is continued with the glorious listing of an abundance of offspring.

But as short and as theologically framed as this narrative is, it still betrays some medical knowledge surrounding pregnancy and childbirth. When the long barren Rachel finally gives birth to her second son, Ben-Oni / Ben-Jamin, Gen 35:16 and 17 describe her labor with variations of the term *qasha* (‘difficult’/‘hard’). It is the only term used in biblical childbirth narratives that might allude to the way a woman giving birth might feel. Yet, the ancient authors only applied this term in Rachel’s narrative, and, in addition, they chose a term that also has theological importance and, as we will see later, points to the actual reason why the authors told this story.

Aside from this personal note turned theological, there is another detail that shows medical knowledge in regard to childbirth. The attending woman, who is named *hamjalädüt*, a term that only appears in connection with Rachel’s and Tamar’s birth experiences as well as, notably, in the Exodus narrative (Ex 1:17–21), comforts Rachel by using the well-known phrase ‘do not fear’ (*‘al tirah*) and by stating that Rachel will have another son. On the level of the story, this news is supposed to wipe away Rachel’s pains and encourage her to continue in the birthing process.¹⁶ But it also hints at the fact that the midwife was able to diagnose the gender of the child before the actual birth process was completed. This might point to a breech birth, which would increase the risk for both mother and child and might even lead to their deaths. Since the narrative tells us that Rachel was actually able to name her son before she died (Gen 35:18), it is likely that the breech position caused a rupture in her uterine tissue, leading to excessive bleeding that could not be stopped by the birth attendant. That Ben-Oni / Ben-Jamin survived might be due to the medical intervention of the woman supporting Rachel during this possible breech birth.¹⁷ None of this is, however, detailed in the biblical text. Again, the theological purpose of the story overshadows the recounting of the actual event.

Tamar, Peretz, and Zerah

One of Jacob’s sons, Judah, is involved in the third case of difficult conception, pregnancy, and labor in the Hebrew Bible. Notably, this brings the difficult childbirth motif into the third generation involving (a) Jacob’s mother at the birth of Jacob himself, (b) Jacob’s wife at the birth of one of his favorite sons, and (c) the fourth son of Jacob born into the family by Leah. This connection between the three narratives of difficult childbirth is supported

by the intertextual word choices that especially parallel the births of the two pairs of twins in Gen 25 and Gen 38.¹⁸

In a complicated case of levirate marriage, Tamar conceives by her father-in-law and bears twins under difficult circumstances, Peretz and Zerah,¹⁹ who both continue the line of Jacob into the future.²⁰ Frymer-Kensky writes about Tamar's accomplishment:

By continuing to consider herself a member of Judah's family and insisting on securing her own future within its parameters, she has made it possible for that family to thrive and develop into a major tribe and eventually into the Judean state.²¹

The fact that she is first called righteous and immediately bears male twins is a sign that the ancient authors of Gen 38 consider Tamar to be blessed beyond measure.²²

Tamar's story also provides the modern reader with the most extensive look into ancient obstetric knowledge as it was available during the time when this story was penned. First, as with Rebecca's pregnancy, there appears to be a diagnosis of the twin pregnancy by a midwife (*hamjalädät*; see Gen 35:17 and Ex 1:17–21) before the birth of the children, as the attending woman is ready to mark the first-born with a red thread once he arrives. Second, there appears to occur a protrusion and retraction of this marked fetal limb. There might be two medical reasons for this apparent protrusion and retraction: either the midwife was able to retract the limb when she noticed that the second child was actually placed in the uterus in such a way that it stopped the first child from being born, or the retraction happened spontaneously. In the former case, the midwife would have been extremely observant and extremely skillful, as such a manual procedure might lead to injury to mother and child. In the latter case, the fetuses would have to be extremely small, with very little chance of survival into adulthood. Modern obstetric literature describes rare cases of spontaneous repositioning of a protruded limb by the head of the other fetus. More common are active manipulations of a midwife who could have repositioned the protruded limb by cutting the maternal tissue or by another surgical procedure.²³ Third, there appears to have occurred a spontaneous rupturing of the mother's vaginal tissue (see also the naming of the first twin, Peretz, in Gen 38:29), which must have led to mortal danger to Tamar because of excessive bleeding. Again, the text must assume that there was a skilled midwife present who was able to stop the bleeding, as both children and Tamar survived this difficult situation.²⁴

As a first concluding observation, it can be said that the difficult childbirth narratives that are located in the ancestral stories of the book of Genesis are clustered in the family history of Jacob. It appears that the difficulties surrounding the births of these important ancestors become worse and worse. While Sarah only had to battle infertility and experienced a case of delayed

conception, the next generation (Rebecca) experiences infertility, a difficult pregnancy, and a difficult birth. One generation on, Jacob's wives experience infertility (Rachel), delayed (Rachel) and unusual conception (Leah), and difficult childbirth resulting in the death of the mother (Rachel). Yet another generation onward, Jacob's son Judah fathers what should be his own grandsons in a most unusual case of conception that results in a difficult childbirth event (Tamar). It appears that, on the basis of the narrated history, as the people Israel go through the early stages of their lives, the difficulties involving the 'birth' of this people grow in number and severity. The assumption of the ancient authors is that God's involvement in overcoming these difficulties must have increased accordingly.

Beyond birth: putting medical knowledge into a theological context

The Hebrew Bible does not intend to tell individual stories of giving birth or of being born. The most detailed birth narratives are those clustered in Jacob's family involving the birth of Rebecca's and Isaac's sons Jacob and Esau, the birth of Jacob and Rachel's son Ben-Oni / Ben-Jamin, and the birth of Judah's and Tamar's sons Peretz and Zerah. There is much indication that these narratives are more concerned with the fact that gynecological and obstetric difficulties are overcome, more about the direct and indirect divine involvement, and more about the importance of the offspring for the history of the people than about the experiences of mothers and children during this threshold experience in life.

When birth becomes a metaphor for crisis

As I have shown elsewhere, the metaphor of birth is used extensively throughout the Hebrew Bible and beyond.²⁵ It tells of personal, local, or universal crises causing expressions of fear and anxiety and affecting individuals or entire groups of people. These crises might be caused by relatively small events, such as the oppression experienced by one individual only; or involve historical events, such as battles; or even universe-changing events, such as the prospect of the future 'day of YHWH.'

While actual birth narratives use terminology of birth and emotions sparsely, biblical authors are much more outspoken when it comes to applying female emotions and behavior during birth to male behavior during a crisis. Rachel's childbirth experience that leads to her death, for example, is the only one that is described as being 'difficult' (*qasha*), but male protagonists (including God) who experience a crisis, 'like a woman giving birth,' groan, pant and gasp for breath, change their complexion, display feeble hands, or tremble.²⁶

The reason why the birth event lends itself so easily to metaphoric descriptions of crisis is that the concepts of 'birth' and 'crisis' have several important aspects in common: (a) they are both understood as being unstoppable once they are underway; (b) there is no option to escape the situation

once it has started—one must live through it or die in the process; and (c) they bring people to the threshold between life and death.²⁷

The birth narratives of the Hebrew Bible, especially those that describe difficult cases of childbirth, thus function as points of reference for the reader. It can be imagined that when faced with a crisis or fears of a crisis that might have caused the ancient reader to feel helpless ‘like a woman in labor,’ they could refer back to actual ‘descriptions’ of childbirth and find two points of consolation there: (a) the ancestors of Israel were faced with similar crises; and (b) the crises they experienced ended in a positive way, as they were solved by the divinity and somehow led to something that was for the benefit of Israel. Thus, as the authors of the biblical texts saw it, the difficulties experienced by Rebecca were actually a sign of a larger conflict that was acted out within her belly and was solved in favor of Israel’s ancestor Jacob. The death of Rachel was certainly a tragedy but also led to the birth of a son, which is already announced by the attending woman as a consolation to the dying mother. And Tamar’s story shows that the people will increase even if there are difficulties involving the natural progression of the generations. In all cases, the theological intent of the authors makes sure that the texts show God as one who provides, foresees, arranges, and plans for the good of Israel, which are points of consolation that might have been comforting to readers of these texts throughout times and contexts.

Terminological choices as indicators of literary purpose

As was shown, biblical authors intended that both narratives of difficult childbirth and the birth metaphor as it is applied to men undergoing crises point to the divine leadership overcoming these human tribulations. The terminological choices made by the biblical authors indicate which larger themes and aspects in the history of Israel show that divine forbearance and guidance that brought the people Israel out of crisis into deliverance and freedom. A short overview of the intertextual terminological relationships between the narratives of difficult childbirth and other important narratives in the Hebrew Bible will confirm this observation.²⁸

‘He came out’: yatsa²⁹

This is the most common term used in the narratives of difficult births indicating the ‘coming out’ of the uterus, the ‘emerging’ of the child / the children, or the beginning of the life of the children. Jacob and Esau both ‘come out’ in Gen 25:25 and 25:26 respectively. The narrative about Tamar giving birth to twins uses the verb no less than three times in three verses: Gen 38:28, 29, and 30.³⁰

In the Hebrew Bible, the root is rather common. It appears over 1000 times in different forms, has equivalents in a number of ancient Near Eastern languages, and denotes a ‘going out/in’ if used in the *qal* form or a ‘leading

out/in' if used in the *hiphil*. It can be used for people moving around, the release of slaves, objects going forth, the going forth to battle, the performance of cultic acts, the issuing of divine commands from the mouth of God, and in many other contexts.

Most importantly, *yatsa* is the *terminus technicus* for the exodus event. YHWH can go forth in battle in order to liberate,³¹ Moses and Aaron call for the departure of the people,³² 'having come/coming out of Egypt' becomes a standard phrase in the book of Exodus and beyond.³³ Deuteronomistic texts such as Deut 4:45–46 connect the giving of the laws to the event of the exodus. The passage in 1 Ki 8:9 draws a long connecting line between events at the ark, the laws of God, and the exodus out of Egypt.

As these intertextual relationships show, both childbirth and the exodus are seen by the Hebrew Bible as divine acts of deliverance. The individual/ the people who was/were formerly bound are first set free through direct or indirect divine influence so that they, and this is a second important aspect here, can spread out freely. Preuss writes:

The 'bringing out' from Egypt as an act of deliverance on the part of Yahweh, with the gift of the land as its goal, is a theohistorical and theocentric message to the exilic community, living in the hope that it, too, will be similarly 'brought out,' so that Yahweh may once again be the God of his people in the land.³⁴

The interesting use of the term *yatsa* thus creates an internal connection between the exodus event and the birth events as they are told in these narratives of difficult childbirth. The theological message of this intertextual terminological connection is: As Israel 'came out' of Egypt, the forefathers of Israel (Jacob/Israel as the most prominent of all) 'came out' of their mothers' wombs. As Israel spread out into the land and grew as a people, the forefathers of Israel spread out into their land and grew into larger and larger families.³⁵

The use of the verb *yatsa* also points backwards in narrated history, as it connects the 'coming out' of Rebecca's and Tamar's children with the divine command to Abraham to 'come out' of the land and occupy a new one. Gordon J. Wenham already observed:

The history of Isaac's family is being deliberately compared with that of Abraham. And if this is so, special attention needs to be paid to the divine oracle summarizing the future career of Esau and Jacob in 25:23 for this occupies a position analogous to the promise made to Abraham in 12:1–3. The latter passage is of cardinal importance not just for the Abraham cycle but for the whole Pentateuch whose theme it states. Here, 25:23 is similarly programmatic: it announces the God-determined career of Jacob to be one of conflict culminating in ultimate triumph.³⁶

An additional indicator that this is intentional is the use of ‘people(s)’ in both oracles, with Gen 12:23 predicting the separation of Jacob and Esau and their descendants, and Gen 12:2 predicting the growth of Abraham’s family.

‘How have you broken through your breach?’: perets³⁷

In the Hebrew Bible, the root appears less than 100 times, a fifth of which either refer to the family of Judah or the geographic area named after him. Its basic meaning is ‘to break through (a wall),’³⁸ which corresponds to the meaning of the term in Akkadian and Ugaritic. ‘Breaking into a wall’ for the purpose of destruction can be used metaphorically when God causes a breach within the people or within individuals that are like walls.³⁹

The idea of ‘breaking out of a wall’ has a positive sense and implies that someone gains space and freedom.⁴⁰ This is the meaning of the wordplay in Gen 38:29. It designates the cut, the breach, made by the firstborn into his mother’s body. The use of the term here indicates a connection to other texts where this forceful breaking out and expanding/spreading is intended. Interestingly, they all refer to the growth of Jacob’s descendants, either his direct family line as in Gen 28:14, Israel in Egypt (Ex 1:12), or Israel of the future (Isa 54:3).⁴¹ In addition, the term is used to show Jacob as the subject of growing wealth in Gen 30:43.

The limited use of the term *perets* in the Hebrew Bible in its positive sense of ‘breaking out’ thus points to one preferred general theme: the growing of Israel as a whole or as the nuclear family of Jacob/Israel even before the exodus. Its use in Tamar’s story might be a play on words combining the idea of the breach at birth and spreading out after birth in one term.⁴²

‘The midwife took it and tied a scarlet thread onto his hand’: qashar and shani⁴³

The terms derived from the root *qashar* only occur about sixty times in the Hebrew Bible and have the meaning of ‘to bind (on).’ It is used in connection to the noun *shani* in both Jos 2:18–21, when God-fearing Rahab ties a scarlet band onto her window as a sign that marks the house that is supposed to be protected, and in Gen 38:28, when the midwife ties a scarlet band onto the hand of the child whose hand protruded first as a sign that marks the first-born. Older scholarship suggests that the color scarlet is of significance here as it has apotropaic powers,⁴⁴ possibly a psychological effect,⁴⁵ or is a sign of a prostitute;⁴⁶ yet there might simply be a connection to the name Zerah, which means ‘sunrise.’⁴⁷

Both of the instances where the binding of a scarlet thread occurs deal with theological reflection on the expansion of Israel, once individually as Tamar delivers two children, and once of entire Israel as they enter the divinely promised land. It has long been noticed that the book of Joshua mirrors many aspects of the exodus from Egypt:

It is not surprising to find Rahab acting as ‘midwife’ of the embryonic Israel ... God promises to be with Joshua as with Moses (Josh. 1:5); flint knives are used in circumcisions (Josh. 5:2–3); Joshua and Moses—and only they—are told to remove their shoes because they stand on holy ground (Josh. 5:15); and the people cross the Jordan on dry land as they had crossed the Red Sea. The narrator heightens the parallel between Rahab and the Exodus story by using the relatively rare word for ‘hide,’ *spn*, when she conceals the two Israelites under the flax ... Rahab hides the Israelites spies just as Moses’ mother hid the baby. The women of the Exodus have found their successor.⁴⁸

The scarlet thread tied around the hand of an Israelite being delivered by his mother, and around the window of a woman who is a deliverer to Israel and will be delivered from harm because of it, ties the stories of Tamar and Rahab together on both a terminological and a theological level.⁴⁹ Both texts also include the theme of trust in the divinity, as Tamar follows through on her God-given right to conceive children within Judah’s family and Rahab gets to save her house because of her loyalty to the God of Israel.⁵⁰

‘*She had hard labor*’: *qasha*⁵¹

As mentioned above, terminology based on the adverb *qasha* is equally rare in the narratives about difficult childbirth and only appears twice in Rachel’s story (Gen 35:16 and 17). In the Hebrew Bible, the term has the figurative sense of ‘being hard, harsh, cruel’ and can be applied both to people and objects. It can refer to Israel when they display a negative attitude towards God and can be described as being ‘stiff-necked,’⁵² but also to the pharaoh who refuses to let Israel go,⁵³ which again provides us with an intertextual connection, albeit a small one, to the exodus event. The creation narratives and the divine punishment of Leviathan are the contexts of the use of the term in Isa 27:1.⁵⁴

‘*Two nations from your loins will divide*’: *parad*

The root *parad* is relatively rare in the Hebrew Bible and denotes situations of separation or isolation. It can be applied to nonhuman references such as the river of Eden that divides in Gen 2:10 or the separation of the flock that is the foundation of Jacob’s wealth in Gen 30:40. The ancestral stories are also the context of other occurrences of the verb. In Gen 13:9–14, Abraham and Lot separate, and an oracle predicts the separation of peoples as foreshadowed in Rebecca’s twins in Gen 25:23.⁵⁵ The verb also points to the divinely planned and executed apportioning of land to various nations in Deut 32:8.

*'Inside her, the children moved around tumultuously': razaz*⁵⁶

The rare root only occurs as a verb in the Hebrew Bible and only once in the *hithpolel*, when the struggle between Jacob and Esau is described (Gen 25:22). In other stems, it has the meaning of 'to oppress' or 'to break' and is, interestingly, several times applied to Egypt: Egypt is a broken reed and pierces anyone who leans on it (2 Kgs 18:21 and Ezek 29:7). The creation theme is the background to Ps 74:14, when the verb is used in the *piel* to describe the action that God used to crush the heads of Leviathan.

The intertextually important terminological indicators that show that the narratives of difficult births are supposed to direct the minds of the readers to other important themes in the Hebrew Bible can be summarized in the following table.

<i>Exodus</i>	<i>Expansion (into the land) and extension (of the line of David)</i>	<i>Following the commandments</i>	<i>Creation</i>
Gen 25:25–26	Gen 25:25–26		<i>yatsa</i>
Gen 38:28–30	Gen 38:28–30		
	Gen 38:29		<i>perets</i>
	Gen 38:28	Gen 38:28	<i>qashar</i>
Gen 35:16–17			<i>qasha</i>
	Gen 25:23		Gen 25:23 <i>parad</i>
Gen 25:22			Gen 25:22 <i>razaz</i>

Thus, when one investigates the semantic fields provided by the narratives of difficult childbirth, one is pointed to several other important contexts in which these semantic fields reappear: the themes of creation, obedience to the commandments, Davidic lineage as an extension of the family line of Jacob, and, most prominently, the themes of the exodus and the expansion into the divinely promised land. Taking these intertextual connections seriously adds another layer of theological meaning to the narratives of difficult childbirth as they occur in the book of Genesis.

Conclusion

The deeper meanings of the narratives of difficult childbirth and their terminological relationship to other important themes in the Hebrew Bible have often been overlooked in modern scholarship. In the past, the childbirth narratives (especially the one about Rachel) have often been seen instead as biographical or etiological, adding some minor details to the general story, such as the naming of a child or the location of a landmark, but having little deeper importance within their larger context. Tamar's story is a prime example of such oversight, as the view of Walter Brueggemann reflects:

This peculiar chapter stands alone, without connection to its context. It is isolated in every way and is most enigmatic. It does not seem to belong with any of the identified sources of ancestral tradition. It is not evident that it provides any significant theological resource. It is difficult to know in what context it might be of value for theological exposition.⁵⁷

Contrary to this view, it has been shown here that the narratives of difficult childbirth in Gen 38 as well as those in Gen 25 and 35 are both thematically as well as terminologically skillfully intertwined within their contexts and with each other.⁵⁸ They are decidedly genealogical and theological in a larger sense, as the biblical authors intend to tell of the connection of Jacob's line backwards to Abraham's descendants and forward to King David,⁵⁹ and as they also point to some of the larger themes in the Hebrew Bible, especially the exodus theme and the theme of expansion into the land. In that sense, they are much more than biographical notes on the ancestresses of Israel and their immediate offspring, and a treasure trove for both scholars of ancient religious history and theologians. If read between the lines, however, they do provide some important insights into ancient medical knowledge.

The figure of Tamar and the narrative of the birth of her twins appears to be of exemplary importance, and almost functions like a hinge between the different purposes and themes. First, as to the question of family relationships: on the one hand, the narrative of difficult birth in Gen 38 contains many obvious (barness/delayed conception, twins, sibling rivalry, hidden identity, deception through clothing, goat-kid motif)⁶⁰ and less obvious terminological parallels to the birth of Rebecca's sons in Gen 25 so that Tamar is clearly connected to Jacob's line and the events therein. This is clearly recognized by the Septuagint, which renders Gen 38:27 as 'she *also* had twins in her womb,' adding an implicit comparison to Rebecca.⁶¹ On the other hand, her children clearly point to the continuation of the line of Jacob to Moses and even beyond him to the Davidic line in the book of Ruth.⁶² Second, as to the question of interrelatedness of themes: the narrative of difficult birth in Tamar's case contains several terminological hints that connect it to the exodus tradition and the theme of the expansion of the people into the land (*yaza*, *perez*, *qashar*). Frymer-Kensky writes:

The scarlet cord brings Rahab into the august company of the barrier-breakers of David's ancestry. Moreover, the Israelite men explain, the scarlet cord is to be used in a special way. Rahab is to gather her family into her house ... Once again, the alert reader, ancient and modern, may catch the reference. On the night of the slaying of the firstborn of Egypt, the Israelites marked their doors with lamb's blood and stayed inside. Rahab's family, inside the house marked in red, is to be rescued from Jericho as the Israelites were from Egypt.⁶³

The narratives of difficult childbirth such as the one involving Tamar and her sons thus bear theological undertones of their authors' trust in the past history of God and Israel, which is realized in the divine promise of freedom (via the exodus context) and prosperity (via the expansion-into-the-land theme) for Israel. These undertones are present through the semantic field appearing both in the narratives of difficult childbirth and the larger biblical themes to which they point, as well as in the placing of these narratives within the ancestral story of Jacob, whose line extends to both Moses, the hero of the exodus, and David, the most prominent king of Israel.

Thus, on the one hand, the narratives of difficult childbirth in Gen 25, Gen 28, and Gen 38 are the most extensive descriptions of women's experience undergoing childbirth in the Hebrew Bible. In this sense, they do more justice to what women and children undergo during this trying time than the common formulaic expression 'x knew his wife; she conceived and bore a son' would ever allow. In addition, the stories of Rebecca, Rachel, and Tamar occasionally attest to the amount of obstetric knowledge available at the time of the composition of these texts, however hidden beneath layers of theological interpretation it might be. On the other hand, it is very obvious that the biblical authors use these narratives of difficult childbirth first and foremost for the purpose of connecting them to the larger themes in the biblical narrative, notably the exodus event. By displaying numerous conscious intertextual parallels and by reworking these texts from a theological perspective, they attested to their belief in the active divine involvement in the birth of the people of Israel, as a whole and as individuals.

Notes

- 1 I dedicate this article to my wonderful teacher at the University of Chicago, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, who is sorely missed by many.
- 2 This is already the case in ancient Near Eastern birth narratives. There, the common genre of childbirth incantations was to be applied to any woman in labor. Texts that talk about the birth of royal offspring such as Gudea Cyl A (see Dietz O. Edzard, *Gudea and His Dynasty: The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia. Early Periods 3.1* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997]); or Eannatum (see W.H.P. Römer, 'Geierstele des Eannatum von Lagasch,' in *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments TUAT* [ed. Otto Kaiser; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1984], I: 289–353), lift up the importance of the king and the greatness of the divine favor applied at his birth rather than narrate historical memories. A possible exception might be the so-called 'Assyrian Elegy,' K.890 (see Erica Reiner, *Your Thwarts in Pieces, Your Mooring Rope Cut: Poetry from Babylonia and Assyria* [Ann Arbor: Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies at the University of Michigan, 1985]), of which only a single copy has survived.
- 3 On ancient Near Eastern views of childbirth, see Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992); Marten Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible* (Groningen: Styx Publications, 2000).

- 4 See, for example, Gen 16:2, 20:18, 1 Sam 1:5–6.
- 5 In the ancient Near East, see, for example, Ligabue 51–53a:⁵¹ gi-se-en dXXX amtu(GÉME) ša Sin(dXXX) a-la-da šap-šu-qa-at še-er-ra⁵² ku-na-at še-er-ra ku-na-at ana qa-tu-ú napište(ZI-te) mahisi(ŠU.RA) si-ku-rum⁵³ sa-ni-iq būbu(KĀ-bu) ana tīnuqi(NU:TI:KI) la-lu-ú ēmur(IGI.DU8)-ši-ma Sin(dXXX)...⁵¹ ‘Gi-Sin, slave-girl of Sin, has trouble in childbirth. The child ⁵² is stuck, the child is stuck, to bring life to an end. The bolt is drawn,⁵³ the door is secured against the suckling babe. Sin saw her and...’. See Niek Veldhuis, *A Cow of Sin* (Gröningen: Styx Publications, 1991), 64. Other examples are VAT 8869, YOS 11 19, and possibly YBC 4603.
- 6 Gen 18:11–13.
- 7 Gen 18:14 (Sarah); Gen 30:22 (Rachel). See also Jer 1:5; Isa 44:2, 24; 49:5; Ps 139:13–16; Job 10:8–11; 31:15.
- 8 Whether this important detail is the product of a historical development or simply the expression of conflicting views in the Hebrew Bible is a matter of debate within scholarship. Andreas Kunz, ‘Die Vorstellung von Zeugung und Schwangerschaft im antiken Israel,’ *ZAW* 111 (1999): 561–582, 572, writes ‘daß eine Trennlinie zwischen vorpriesterlichen Tradenten und priesterschriftlichen Trägerkreisen zu ziehen ist, wobei zugleich seit der exilisch-nachexilischen Zeit das “Verdienst” der Zeugung in erster Linie dem Mann zugesprochen wurde.’ On ‘female seed’ in Greek and Roman gynecology and the Talmud, see Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, 8–9 and 200. On pregnancy and birth in ancient Egypt, see Erika Feucht, ‘Der Weg ins Leben,’ in *Naissance et petite enfance dans l’Antiquité* (ed. V. Dasen; Freiburg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 33–53.
- 9 Compare the ancient Near Eastern idea of birth being a journey from darkness into the sun, for example, in The Prayer to Ea, Šamaš, and Marduk:³ a-bi ir-ha-an-ni ummī(AMA.MU) ul-dan-ni⁴ ik-tap-du-ma kīma(GIN7) siēri(MUŠ) ... a-na-ku⁵ ul-tu libbi(ŠĀ) ik-le-ti ū-sia-am-ma dšamaš a-mur-ka ...³ ‘My father created me, my mother gave birth to me.⁴ They strove and like a snake⁵ I came forth from darkness and saw you, Šamaš.’ Quote from W.G. Lambert, ‘DINGIR.ŠĀ.DIB.BA Incantations,’ *JNES* 33 (1974): 267–322.
- 10 On the gestation process as a solidifying of fluids, also see Wisdom of Solomon 7:2 and Lev Rabbah XIV, 9. In Greek thought, see Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, 12–13. The related common metaphor of the uterus being an oven and the child being ‘baked like bread’ as it was used in ancient Greek literature and beyond is not used by the authors of the biblical text; see Helen King, ‘Making a Man: Becoming Human in Early Greek Medicine,’ in *The Human Embryo* (ed. G.R. Dunstan; Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990), 10–19; Ann Ellis Hanson, ‘Paidopīia: Metaphors for Conception, Abortion, and Gestation in the Hippocratic Corpus,’ in *Ancient Medicine in Its Socio-Cultural Context* (Ph.J. van der Eijk and H.F.J. Horstmannshoff; Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1995), 291–305; Page du Bois, *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
- 11 See below. Also refer to Claudia D. Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis: Evidence from the Ancient Near East, the Hebrew Bible, and 1QH XI,1–18* (BZAW 382; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008).
- 12 See Ps 22:10, Isa 66:9, Job 10:18.
- 13 There are a few more examples that indicate the breadth of medical knowledge surrounding pregnancy and childbirth in the Hebrew Bible. It was apparently common knowledge that a pregnant woman’s lifestyle would affect the unborn child (Judg 13:4–5) or that shock can induce labor early (1 Sam 4:19–20). The

Hebrew Bible mentions stillbirth several times (Num 12:12, Ecc 6:3, Job 3:16, and Ps 58:8, among others) as well as the death of newborn children (Job 3:11), and there are laws against the mistreatment of pregnant women. Killing pregnant women was an (alleged) atrocity of war (see 2 Kgs 15:16).

- 14 Tikya Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 22; Nahum M. Sarna, *Bereshit Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (The JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia, New York, and Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 179, expresses the same sentiment from the perspective of Jacob:

There is another aspect to the oracle. Its presence here actually suggests a moral judgment on Jacob's behavior, for it tacitly asserts that his claim to be heir to the divine promises rests solely upon God's predetermination. Thus, his election is thereby disengaged from the improper means he later employed to obtain his rights.

- 15 Brigitte Bergmann, who worked as a midwife for several decades, pointed out to me that a diagnosis of a twin pregnancy is extremely difficult without modern diagnostic tools. She estimates that she was able to diagnose about 70% of twin pregnancies when only using a stethoscope.
- 16 Benno Jacob, *Das Buch Genesis* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 2000), 666; reprint of the 1934 edition published by Schocken Verlag, states that the Talmud considers the birth of a son to be easier than the birth of a girl (Jacob does not list references).
- 17 Gen 35:17.
- 18 Parallel word choices can also be observed in Gen 38:27 and Gen 25:24, as well as in Gen 38:30 and Gen 25:26. The motif of the hand also appears in both texts: Gen 38:28–30 and 25:26. In addition, the questions of who is the younger/the older and who is the more important/less important are discussed in both texts. Eva Salm, *Juda und Tamar: Eine exegetische Studie zu Gen 38* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1993), 154–157, discusses these and possible other parallels extensively. Because of these parallels and the importance of Tamar's children, Lothar Ruppert, *Genesis: Ein kritischer und theologischer Kommentar, 4. Teilband* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2008), 153, calls Tamar 'eine weitere Rebekka, die eigentliche Stammutter Israels.'
- 19 Sarna, *Bereshit Genesis*, 270, lifts up the importance of the name Peretz, as it is

the only name in this chapter for which an explanation is given, a fact that reflects the preeminence of the Perezite clan within the tribe of Judah. David was descended from Perez, according to Ruth 4:18–22 and 1 Chronicles 2:5, 9–15. The fact that ten generations separate David from Perez—symbolic of a complete and significant unit of time ...—shows that the birth of Perez is taken to be a historic turning point.

Also see Gunther W. Plaut, ed., *The Torah. A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 253; Esther Blachman, *The Transformation of Tamar (Genesis 38) in the History of Jewish Interpretation* (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 53, noticed another connection between the stories of Tamar and Rebecca: both one of Tamar's sons and one the grandson of Rebecca by Esau bear the name Zerah.

- 20 For the treatment of this story in midrash and medieval exegesis, see Stefan C. Reif, *Jews, Bible and Prayer: Essays on Jewish Biblical Exegesis and Liturgical Notions* (BZAW 498; Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 50–72; L. Ginzberg,

- The Legends of the Jews*, 7 volumes (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909–1938), 2: 32–37, 142–143, 198–201; 5: 332–337, 367–368.
- 21 Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 274. See also Jacob, *Das Buch Genesis*, 722: ‘Sie ist sich der hohen Bestimmung bewußt, die sie erfüllen sollte, indem sie in Judas Familie heiratet.’
 - 22 The importance of Tamar was already a topic in ancient Jewish literature, *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* calls her ‘our mother,’ a singular title in biblical and extrabiblical literature (see P.W. van der Horst, ‘Einige Beobachtungen zum Thema Frauen im antiken Judentum,’ *BThZ* 10 [1993]: 77–79, 84). Morimura Nobuko, ‘The Story of Tamar: A Feminist Interpretation of Genesis 38,’ *The Japan Christian Review* 59 (1993): 55–67, 62, pointed out, she is the only woman of the Hebrew Bible who is called ‘righteous’ (Gen 38:26). Also see *Bereshit Rabba* par. 85 on Gen 38:27, which explains the short spelling for ‘twins’ in Gen 25:24 by stating the Rebecca bore a good child and a bad child; the longer spelling in Gen 38:27 indicates that Tamar’s children are both just (see Jürgen Ebach, *Genesis 37–50* [Freiburg, Basel, and Wien: Herder, 2007], 152); Blachman, 2, summarizes: ‘It is clear that in Gen 38 Tamar breaks accepted social rules and acts contrary to patriarchy’s prescribed roles. Postbiblical interpretations recreate this morally ambiguous story, eliminating its potentially problematic aspects.’ In the middle ages, Tamar reaches a cosmic significance when she is seen as the progenitor of the messiah. For the figure of Tamar in the history of Jewish interpretation, see Blachman as a whole.
 - 23 I thank Dr. Jürgen Hebenstreit, Rudolstadt, Germany, for explaining the details of these procedures to me and for pointing me to modern literature on this topic.
 - 24 See Gen 46:12 (Peretz) and Num 26:20 (Zerah). Also note that 1 Chr 4:1 does not list Zerah as one of the five sons of Judah. Tamar is mentioned in the biblical text only when there is reference to her children, as in Ruth 4:12 or 1 Chr 2:4.
 - 25 See Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis*. On childbirth imagery in the prophets as expressions of fear or failure to bring forth, see David J. Clark, ‘Sex-Related Imagery in the Prophets,’ *BT* 33 (1982): 409–413. On childbirth imagery as an expression of emotional distress, see Josef Scharbert, *Der Schmerz im Alten Testament* (Bonn: Peter Hanstein Verlag, 1955).
 - 26 Groaning: Isa 42:14, Jer 22:23; gasping for breath: Isa 42:14; changing complexion: Isa 13:8, Jer 30:6, Nah 2:11, Joel 2:6; feeble hands: Isa 13:7, Jer 6:24, Jer 50:43, Jer 49:24; trembling: Ps 55:6, Isa 21:4, Jer 6:24, Jer 22:23, Jer 50:43, Mic 4:9–10, Hab 3:16.
 - 27 Maria Häusl, *Bilder der Not* (Freiburg, Basel, Vienna, Barcelona, Rome, and New York: Herder, 2003), 361, points out the male perspective in the birth narratives, which might further support the easy application of male perceptions of birth onto descriptions of crisis experienced by males:

Zwar entspricht das Ausgeliefert-Sein an die Wehen der Geburtserfahrung von Frauen, doch illustrieren hier Wehen und Schmerzen einseitig die Todesgefahr, obwohl sie zu jeder, auch zur glücklich verlaufenden Geburt gehören. Eine solche Perspektive muß deshalb als einseitiger “Blick von außen” auf die Geburt gewertet werden.
 - 28 The terminology investigated here is chosen either because it occurs frequently in more than one of the narratives of difficult birth or because it appears just once and is relatively rare in the Hebrew Bible.

- 29 See H.D. Preuss, 'Yatsa,' in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringren; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), VI: 225–250. The quotes in the headings of this section are taken from Frymer-Kensky's, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (2002), translation.
- 30 The narrative surrounding the birth experience of Rachel does not actually describe Ben-Oni/Ben-Jamin being born but focuses on the death of Rachel and the naming of her son instead. Also see the birth-related use in 2 Sam 7:12, 2 Sam 16:11, 2 Ki 20:18, Isa 39:7, Jer 1:5, 20:18, and Sir 40:1. Note the connection of many of these texts to the promise of descentance to David and Abraham.
- 31 Ex 11:4, 8.
- 32 Ex 12:31.
- 33 Examples are Ex 19:1, Num 1:1, Deu 16:3, 1 Ki 6:1, and Jos 2:10.
- 34 Preuss, 'Yatsa,' 239.
- 35 The order of the sentences could certainly be reversed and are not an indication of attempts at dating these texts.
- 36 Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (Word Biblical Commentary; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 173.
- 37 See also J. Conrad, 'Prz,' *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringren; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), XII: 104, 110.
- 38 Examples in 2 Ki 14:13; 2 Chr 26:6. The Septuagint translations of the term are quite diverse.
- 39 Examples in Ex 19:22, 24; Job 16:14.
- 40 Examples are Mic 2:13; 2 Sam 5:20; Prov 3:10.
- 41 Also see 1 Chr 4:38 and the opposite idea in Hos 4:10.
- 42 Conrad, 'Prz,' 110, writes: 'the reference may be to the notion of spreading out or expanding, perhaps as a parental wish at birth.'
- 43 On *qashar*, see also J. Conrad, 'Kashar,' *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringren; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), XIII: 196–201; on *shani*, see also H.M. Beyse, 'Shani,' *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringren; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), XV: 339–342 and Roland Gradwohl, *Die Farben im Alten Testament* (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1963).
- 44 Gradwohl mentions the examples in Gen 38:28, Js 2:18, Nah 2:4, Cant 4:3, and others. See especially Gradwohl, *Die Farben*, 74–78. See also G. Binder, 'Geburt II (religionsgeschichtlich),' in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (ed. T. Kluser et al.; Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1976), 9: 43–171, 66, who understands the scarlet thread as the traditional symbol for the netherworld:

Vordergründig erscheint der rote Faden als Erkennungsmal für die Erstgeborenen, dahinter steht jedoch sicher alter Aberglaube; denn rot ist Unterweltsfarbe und Farbe der Rechtssprechung, der rote Faden ein Unterweltsrequisit, gleichsam ein Amulett zur Abwendung von Schaden und zur Übertragung von Lebensenergien.
- 45 Gradwohl, *Die Farben*, 76, mentions Jer 4:30 and Nah 2:3–4.
- 46 W. Gunter Plaut, ed., *The Torah. A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 252.
- 47 Beyse, 'Shani,' 341. It should also be noted that the *shani* usually refers to dyed garments of affluent people or fabric used within a cultic context. Notably, the

verb can also be used (albeit without the addition of *shani*) for the tying of the commandments as a sign of intending to keep them. Examples are Deut 6:8; Deut 11:8; Prov 3:3.

- 48 Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, 36.
- 49 For example, both Tamar and Rahab are also called a '*zonah*.' Midrash HaGadol adds that the spies in Jericho must have been Peretz and Zerah.
- 50 The same can be said for the tying of the commandments around one's body, as they are a sign of trust in the divine laws.
- 51 See M. Zipor, '*Kasha*,' in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringren; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- 52 Examples are Ex 32:9, Deut 9:6.13, and Ezek 3:7.
- 53 Ex 7:3–4; Ex 13:15; Sir 16:15.
- 54 Interestingly, the account of God's crushing of Leviathan in Ps 74:14 uses another rare term, a form of the root *razaz* that also appears in a narrative of difficult birth, Gen 25:22.
- 55 Bereshit Rabbah 63 interprets the struggle between the twins as a struggle between the right faith in God and idolatry: 'When she went by houses of idolatry, Esau would kick ... when she went by synagogies and study-houses, Jacob would kick.' Quotes according to Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary on the Midrash. Volume II: Genesis Rabbah* (Lanham, New York, and Oxford: University Press of America, 2001), 180.
- 56 See Ringren, Helmer, '*razaz*,' in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (ed. G. Johannes Botterweck et al.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), XIII: 641–643.
- 57 Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Interpretation Commentary Series; Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1982), 308–309.
- 58 Also see John Petersen, *Reading Women's Stories* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 162, on Gen 38: 'The tale integrates thematically and conceptually into the ongoing events in the family of Jacob, which many have disputed.' On the interconnectedness of Gen 38 with its larger context, also see the summary in Petersen, *Reading Women's Stories*, 155–164.
- 59 Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 173, points out the connections to the beginning of the Abraham cycle. Also note's observation that the so-called 'Joseph story' is really the 'story of Jacob's line (Gen 37:2)'; see also Bosworth, 42.
- 60 See also Blachman, *The Transformation of Tamar*, 52–53.
- 61 Genesis Rabbah 85 also makes a clear comparison between the two women. Blachman, *The Transformation of Tamar*, 107, proposes that this 'may attest to a popular tradition in other written or oral sources in which Tamar is compared favorably to Rebekah.'
- 62 Stefan C. Reif, *Jews, Bible and Prayer: Essays on Jewish Biblical Exegesis and Liturgical Notions* (BZAW 498; Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 56–57, notes that rabbinic tradition 'identifies the father of the prophet Isaiah with King Amaziah and therefore sees Judah as the progenitor not only of the royalty but also of the prophetic leadership' (*b. Soṭah* 10b and *b. Meg.* 10b). On the embedding of Tamar's story within the Joseph narrative, see Blachman, *The Transformation of Tamar*, 14–17.
- 63 Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, 39–40.

3 Uncooperative breeders

Parental investment and infant abandonment in Hebrew and Greek narrative

David A. Bosworth

Human parents do not raise their children entirely by themselves, but depend on wider networks of support. In scientific jargon, humans are cooperative breeders. These support networks include extended family, neighbors, schools, governments, religious communities, and other public and private institutions. The expression ‘It takes a village to raise a child’ has become trite and politicized, but it aptly captures the meaning of cooperative breeding.¹ Raising a child is a monumental task beyond the capacity of any one person or married couple. Anyone who has children, or recalls being a child, can identify a wide range of people who participate in providing care to children who are not their own. Sometimes these people have been hired by the parents to help, but often they are at least partially paid for by others (e.g., taxpayers, church members, charitable donors) or they offer assistance without remuneration (e.g., family, friends, neighbors). The narrative of the village helping to raise your child sounds warm and delightful, but it has a darker side. What if the village does not want to help? Maybe the villagers signal that the community lacks the resources to care for another new member. What if there is something about you or your child that makes the community reluctant to accept the burden of rearing the child? What if the community regards the pregnancy as illegitimate and the child as therefore unwelcome? What if the child has an obvious disability that suggests a higher cost and reduced benefit? Because we are cooperative breeders, the signals we receive from the community influence whether and how we raise our children.

Societies can be broadly categorized as ‘pro-natal’ or ‘anti-natal,’ depending on how their cultures and policies encourage or discourage reproduction, respectively.² Reproduction might be encouraged positively by offering cash payments to mothers or negatively by restricting access to birth control. Anti-natal cultures, by contrast, encourage birth control and/or offer no help to families with children. Societies are rarely simply pro- or anti-natal and prospective parents routinely receive mixed messages. Many Western countries are experiencing below-replacement-level birth rates and policy makers worry about maintaining economic growth with declining populations, but birth control is widely available and used. Large-scale cultural currents of pro- or anti-natalism influence the decisions people make about whether to become

pregnant or what to do about an existing pregnancy. Smaller-scale communities also have a significant impact. For example, a mother might decide not to keep a child even though the culture is generally pro-natal because her immediate social network is not supportive (e.g., her boyfriend offers to pay for an abortion, but refuses to help raise the child). At the most micro level, people also make decisions about reproduction based on their immediate circumstances and preferences, such as their personal (as opposed to social) resources, and the quality of the relationship with their mates. In sum, infant abandonment and its modern correlates (abortion, filicide) represent a social problem that societies tend to blame on individuals.³

The present paper will apply modern research on parental investment to ancient narratives of infant abandonment. I previously analyzed several ancient Hebrew and Greek stories of infant abandonment with a focus on the infant's influence on its own salvation, for these stories always involve the infant being rescued.⁴ There, I was more interested in the 'cooperative' nature of breeding and why the rescuers decided to save the infants. In the present analysis, I will focus on the opposite question of why the infant was abandoned in the first place. Who makes these decisions, why, and who carries them out? The corpus of stories here will be different from the previous analysis. First, it involves attention to textual descriptions of events leading up to the abandonment of the infant, neglected in my prior work. Second, I overlooked the infancy narrative of Atalanta in my previous study, but I include it here. Third, due to limitations of space, I will focus on the infant abandonment stories in Diodorus, Apollodorus, and the biblical Primary History (Genesis–Kings). These three narrative complexes compile diverse traditions into a more or less coherent whole. The biblical narrative famously has numerous inconsistencies and doublets, and the Greek authors often refer to multiple versions of a narrated event. These three works represent comparable efforts within two societies to render an account of the past from mythical times that seeks to make diverse traditions cohere within one narrative. These traditions tend to be told multiple times as readers interpret a story, seeking to fill in gaps in the concise narratives, and the present study will sometimes attend to these readings. This analysis of a common genre across these texts may invite further comparisons among these similar works.

Infant abandonment

Evolution has forged humans who selectively invest in their offspring depending on a variety of factors including the vigor of the baby, their own immediate circumstances and goals, the openness (or not) of their social networks toward the prospect of another child, and the attitude of the larger culture and legal environment.⁵ The factors influencing these decisions show consistency across modern cultures and correlate with ancient Greek evidence for major risk factors for abandonment: sex, disability, illegitimacy, and poverty.⁶

The sex of the baby can influence the decision about whether it will be kept or not. In many cultures, parents and others value male children more than female children. This sex preference varies by culture and the specific context of the parents. In many communities, the wealthy prefer sons while the poor prefer daughters because the daughters of poor parents can marry into wealthier families, but poor sons have difficulty marrying at all. Consequently, the family lineage has more promise through daughters than sons.⁷ An archaeological excavation of a Roman-period brothel in Ashkelon found that of nineteen newborn skeletons tested for DNA, fourteen were boys. Evidently, the prostitutes favored female babies who might either become prostitutes themselves or marry into better circumstances.⁸ A similar preference for female children is documented among the poor in multiple societies, with the reverse preference for males known among the more wealthy. Gender preference turns out to be complicated and heavily influenced by the longer-term prospects that a son or daughter may produce more grandchildren.

An infant born with obvious disabilities may be at higher risk for abandonment in many cultures, and certainly in ancient Greece. Some communities, however, keep and care for children born disabled. The difference between these cultures appears to be influenced in part by the wealth of the community. Ancient Greek cities were often barely able to feed their populations and sent colonists to settle new places to relieve population stress. In this environment, the community may permit infant exposure because of the need to dissuade people from reproducing too much. An infant born with obvious disabilities would then be seen as not worth raising given the competition for scarce resources. In other contexts, like ancient Egypt, food was plentiful and the pressure to use infant abandonment as a check on reproduction was significantly less. From their subsistence context, 'the Greeks were puzzled by the fact that in Egypt infanticide was officially discouraged.'⁹ Archeological evidence shows that some Egyptian children with disabilities who required extra care were kept and raised.

A powerful influence on social acceptance of a new baby hinges on the circumstances of the pregnancy. In many societies, unwed women who become pregnant face rejection rather than support, and infant abandonment may be strongly encouraged or even required. Communities may be reluctant to offer support to illegitimate pregnancies for several reasons. They fear 'moral hazard,' or the possibility that supporting unwed mothers will encourage more unwed women to become pregnant. Since raising a child requires extraordinary resources, a child without a supportive father and his kin network typically places more strain on the wider community than a child with a helpful father. Legitimacy clarifies paternity and therefore responsibility.

Poverty can nudge a parent toward abandoning a child. The history of European foundling homes shows many poor women abandoning their infants under difficult economic circumstances. Sometimes, they returned to reclaim their children after their circumstances improved, but most often the children had died.¹⁰ Poverty can exacerbate communal refusal to help raise a child because the parents may need more help than most. In communities that

do not offer meaningful assistance to poor mothers, these mothers may feel constrained to abandon an infant.

Sex, disability, illegitimacy, and poverty each place an infant at increased risk for abandonment. Ancient infant abandonment stories may or may not reflect these social realities.

Hebrew infant abandonment stories

There are two infant abandonment stories in the Old Testament: Moses and Ishmael. The foundling Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16 is a metaphorical foundling story about God adopting Jerusalem, but the story includes no information about the parental circumstances that motivated her abandonment, although one may speculate that the female sex of the baby informed the decision.¹¹

Moses

Exodus 1 establishes the context in which Jochebed abandons her infant son, later named Moses. The Hebrews are reduced to slavery by a Pharaoh who worries that the Hebrews ‘are more numerous and powerful than we are’ (בר ונמם מצרעו, Exod 1:9–10) but the Hebrew population continues to grow (1:12). The Egyptians escalate their ruthless treatment and impose hard tasks that make the lives of the Hebrews bitter (1:14). Pharaoh then seeks to kill the Hebrew infant boys at birth, but the midwives do not carry out his order. He then gives the order to ‘all his *עַם*’ (Exod 1:22). *עַם* is generally translated as ‘people’ here, but may mean ‘army.’ Exodus 1 ends on this note of harsh Hebrew slavery and a genocidal command for all infant Hebrew boys to be cast into the Nile. This dismal situation sets the stage for the birth of Moses.

Jochebed becomes pregnant by her husband Amram. Both are Hebrew slaves under the harsh regime described in Exodus 1. Amram disappears from the story, and Jochebed is the agent who decides both to keep her baby and hide him and later decides to abandon him. Her decision to keep him appears to require explanation under the circumstances, since abandoning him appears to make more sense. Moses is a cute and viable baby, so she strives to hide him, but this strategy becomes untenable after three months.¹² At that point, she makes a watertight container and puts the baby in the basket and places the basket in the Nile. After Jochebed leaves, her daughter Miriam remains behind to see what will happen and watches as her brother is rescued by Pharaoh’s daughter, who arranges for her mother to act as wet-nurse to her own son. Jochebed’s pregnancy is legitimate and she clearly desires to keep her son. She hides him at some risk for three months, but under the pressure of harsh slavery and the stress of concealing an infant, her will breaks and she abandons her baby. Her poverty and the hopelessness of slavery explain her choice. Even in the abandonment, she creates a watertight basket that allows her son some hope of survival; she does not cast him in the water to drown, per Pharaoh’s order. The term *שָׁם* (Exod 2:3, ‘put, place’) reflects the care of her action and is pointedly not the term *הִלַּךְ* (Exod 1:22, ‘throw, cast’) that

appears in Pharaoh's order and seems to be a technical term for infant abandonment.¹³ The text does not claim that she strategically places the basket where it might be found, although she may. Unlike her daughter, she does not remain to see what will happen.

Although the pregnancy is legitimate, Amram's absence from the story is striking. In Philo's retelling, he joins his wife in the abandonment (*Moses* 1.2.10–12). One Qumran variant says that Jochebed's maid served as her agent to leave the baby in the river. The introduction of this agent serves to characterize Jochebed as unwilling to carry out the 'dirty work' of abandonment due to its emotional difficulty. This agent protects her from being perceived as cold or callous by readers. It also presents her as relatively high-status (for a slave) and mitigates her poverty as a reason to abandon her baby, placing more emphasis of the fear of discovery and the (unstated) possibility that she or her family might be punished for her disobedience to Pharaoh.

Jochebed's decision to abandon her baby derives from her circumstances as a slave. There is limited evidence about the impact of slavery on infant abandonment, but documentation from slavery in the USA and Caribbean may shed some light on the story of Moses. Slaves in the modern era have been known to abandon their infants, although scholars have not agreed on the frequency or meaning of this act.

It is highly unlikely that slave women who killed their children approached it uniformly—for some, it was probably a deeply sad affair, for others an emotionally neutral one; for some, an act of resistance against slavery, for others an act of altruism toward their offspring.¹⁴

The narrative communicates Jochebed's act as deeply sad and contrary to her wishes (so also the slave Hagar; see below). Her husband vanishes from the narrative, but his cooperation may be assumed if she hid the baby for three months. The text does not say whether Amram remains supportive or becomes less so over the three months. The only textual indications informing Jochebed's decision is the background of Hebrew slavery and the vague reference to the increasing difficulty of keeping the baby hidden.

Ishmael

Hagar abandons Ishmael as an infant when it appears there is no hope for survival. Scholars have debated a few interpretive points about the story. Most importantly, some scholars do not regard Ishmael as an infant in the story because the chronology makes him a teenager.¹⁵ The narrative, however, assumes that Ishmael can be carried by his mother and deposited under a bush, unable to follow his mother. I have argued that Ishmael is an infant in this passage, even though surrounding context does not cohere (Gen 17:25).¹⁶ Similarly, the claim that Pharaoh orders the killing of Hebrew boys does not cohere with the surrounding context in which there appears to be no shortage of Hebrew men the same age as Moses.¹⁷ The biblical narrative is filled with

similar chronological problems and other inconsistencies, so Ishmael should not be incongruously imagined as a teenager in the abandonment story. The motive of Sarah's demand that Hagar leave the household after the birth of Isaac has also received considerable attention, as well as Abraham's failure to provision Hagar and Ishmael more generously. Sarah's demand derives from concern that Ishmael may inherit a significant share of Abraham's estate to the detriment of her own son Isaac. Her survival is not imperiled, but the wealth of her son stands to be reduced.¹⁸ Concern over inherited wealth can motivate discord within families. Abraham is reluctant to cast Hagar and Ishmael out, but accedes to Sarah's demand per God's instructions. Given Abraham's reluctance to send Hagar and Ishmael away, one might expect him to provision them generously, with one or more donkeys or camels to carry ample supplies. Instead, Hagar has only as much food and water as she can carry along with her baby. Abraham's stinginess may be explained at two different levels. First, he might imagine that his poor provisioning is more adequate than it is. People often imagine their deeds to be better than they are.¹⁹ Second, at the narrative level, the infant abandonment story depends on Hagar running out of food and water so that God may provide for her. If Abraham is appropriately generous, then God has no opportunity to rescue Ishmael.

The decision to abandon Ishmael involves several people. At the most immediate level, Hagar leaves her son under a bush when she runs out of supplies in the wilderness and despairs of being able to keep him alive. She moves a distance away so that she will not have to hear his cries. Once cast out of Abraham's house, she becomes a single mother without physical resources or social support to help her raise her child. Still, she only reluctantly abandons Ishmael, due to her hard circumstances. Sarah, Abraham, and God place Hagar in an impossible situation that endangers her and her child. Hagar's decision to abandon is heavily constrained by the abandonment and rejection she experiences from the closest thing she has to family. Even God collaborates in this mistreatment of Hagar, although God later rescues her and Ishmael from the dire situation in which God had placed them.

In both Hebrew infant abandonment stories, the babies are male and without disability and both pregnancies are legitimate. The mothers choose to abandon their infants due to their circumstances; both are slave women with minimal resources and no hope. Jochebed operates under a regime in which she must keep her child hidden. Hagar has no authority to fear, but she also has no support. She has been exiled from the only home she knows and left in poverty and social isolation. Both stories show mothers who love their babies and want to keep them, but who are driven to the extremity of abandonment by circumstances inimical to rearing a child.

Greek infant abandonment stories

Infant abandonment was a socially acceptable practice in the ancient Greek world, and literature reflects this social reality, although not perfectly. In all

cases, infant abandonment stories narrate the rescue and raising of the infant, which would have been a relatively rare happy ending. Two Greek sources broadly resemble the Hebrew narrative complex of Genesis–Kings. Both Diodorus of Sicily and Apollodorus wrote histories that sought to organize diverse prior sources into a coherent narrative whole encompassing history from earliest mythological times. The genre of infant abandonment stories is common to both Greek histories and the biblical narrative complex.

Diodorus of Sicily

Diodorus of Sicily (or Diodorus of Siculus) lived in the first century BCE a contemporary of Julius and Augustus Caesar, and composed the *Bibliotheca Historica*, a universal history from mythological times to his own time. Of the original forty books, Books 1–5 and 11–20 survive.²⁰ The work compiled many sources (several of them named) describing the history of places throughout the known world in an effort to draw together a bewildering array of material into a single accessible narrative. The surviving parts include five infant abandonment stories.

Semiramis

The goddess Derceto exposed her infant for reasons described by Diodorus:

Aphrodite, since she was offended at this goddess [Derceto], inspired in her a violent passion (δεινὸν ἐμβαλεῖν ἔρωτα) for a certain obscure handsome youth among her votaries. Derceto lay (μιγεῖσαν) with the Syrian and gave birth to a daughter (γεννήσαι μὲν θυγατέρα). Then filled with shame of her sinful deed (καταισχυνθεῖσαν δ' ἐπὶ τοῖς ἡμαρτημένοις), she killed the youth and exposed the child in a rocky desert region (τὸ δὲ παιδίον εἰς τινὰς ἐρήμους καὶ πετρώδεις τόπους ἐκθεῖναι), while as for herself, from shame and grief (αἰσχὺν καὶ λύπην) she threw herself into the lake and was changed in the form of her body into a fish.²¹

(Diod. 2.4)

Semiramis is abandoned for reasons apart from being female. Derceto's choice of location minimizes the possibility that the child might be saved, but she is fed by doves until she is discovered by dairy workers. In this case, the mother kills the low-status father and exposes the infant due to her sense of shame. Not only has she, as a goddess, had sex with a low-status mortal, but Aphrodite's deception heightens the humiliation. Her motivation strongly suggests that the infant would be abandoned whether male or female. In addition to killing the father and exposing the infant, Derceto casts herself into a lake from her sense of shame, and emotion often described as a desire to vanish or disappear. The narrative also references her pain, or grief, as a motive for her self-destructive leap into the lake. Derceto has no mentioned

family nor social network that rejects her, but she experiences a deep sense of shame, mentioned twice, that motivates her violence toward others and herself. As a goddess, it is not clear whether her isolation entails any economic hardship, but she feels the social emotion of shame and abandons her daughter for that reason. From the story, it seems the baby would have been abandoned even if it had been male. The child has no disability and poverty is not an issue, so the sole motive for abandonment is the illegitimacy of the pregnancy and Derceto's sense of shame. Unlike with human mothers discussed below, Derceto has no father who punishes her sexual conduct; she punishes herself by killing her lover and abandoning the infant.

Cybele

Diodorus reports a Phrygian story about the birth of the goddess Cybele:

Maeon became king of Phrygia and Lydia and after marrying Dindyme, he begat an infant daughter (γεννησαι μὲν παιδίον θῆλυ). Since he was unwilling to raise it (τρέφειν δ' αὐτὸ μὴ βουλόμενον), he exposed (ἐκθεῖναι) her on the mountain which was called Cybelus.

(Diod. 3.58)

Maeon's reluctance to raise his infant daughter appears most easily explained by her sex. The child is legitimate and the king does not lack resources, but evidently prefers not to bother investing in a girl. The text twice identifies the sex of the baby, which remains the only explanation for Maeon's unwillingness to raise her. The text offers no indication of the mother's feelings on the issue of abandoning the baby girl. The family has resources, the pregnancy is legitimate, and the infant has no disability, but her female sex provides sufficient cause to abandon her. Wealthier families like this one were more likely to favor sons over daughters.

Heracles

The birth story of Heracles involves a lengthy narrative including explanations for his strength deriving from his descent from Zeus through both his father and mother. Zeus also makes the night of conception three times the length of a normal night and the extra time spent in procreation presages the child's exceptional strength. For all Zeus's care and concern for Heracles, his mother abandons him:

Eurydice daughter of Pelops married [Electryon] and gave birth to Alcmene, whom Zeus lay with through deception and she bore Heracles (μυγέντα δι' ἀπάτης Ἡρακλέα γεννησαι)...[Zeus] did not effect this union from the desire of love (ἐρωτικῆς ἐπιθυμίας), as he did with other women,

but rather only for the sake of procreation (παιδοποιίας). Consequently, desiring to give legality to his embraces, he did not choose to offer violence (ἐπιπλοκὴν νόμιμον ποιήσασθαι βιάσασθαι μὲν μὴ βουληθῆναι) to Alcmene, and he could not hope to persuade her because of her chastity (σωφροσύνην). After deciding to use deception, he deceived Alcmene (τὴν ἀπάτην οὖν προκρίναντα διὰ ταύτης παρακρούσασθαι τὴν Ἀλκμήνην) by assuming in every respect the shape of Amphitryon ... After Alcmene had brought forth the baby, since she was fearful of Hera's jealousy she exposed the baby (Ἀλκμήνη δὲ τεκοῦσα καὶ φοβηθεῖσα τὴν τῆς Ἥρας ζηλοτυπίαν, ἐξέθηκε τὸ βρέφος) at a place which to this time is called after him the Field of Heracles.

(Diod. 4.9)

The narrative omits how Alcmene discovers the deception. Somehow, she appears to be aware of the dialogue among the gods in which Zeus announces to all the gods that the son born that day (presumed to be Heracles) would be king over all the descendants of Perseus. Diodorus's narrative refers to Hera's jealousy that motivates her to stay the birth of Heracles and hasten the birth of Eurystheus, another descendant of Perseus. Even if she does not know of these specific machinations, she may know more generally about Hera's jealousy. In any case, Hera's jealousy makes Alcmene too afraid to try to keep the baby she somehow knows to be Zeus's. Although Zeus seems to think of the child as 'legitimate' because he was born of deception rather than rape, he is not the child of his mother's husband. This consideration, however, does not appear to enter into the decision to abandon Heracles. Alcmene's fear of Hera suggests that she might keep a child of a god despite the deception if Hera were not a threat. She is not so committed to the child, however, that she seeks to conceal him as Jochebed does with Moses. The infant is male without any disability. Alcmene has the resources to keep him and the text leaves the impression that her husband would accept the child as his own (i.e., illegitimacy is not an issue). Only the fear of the goddess Hera motivates Alcmene to abandon Heracles, similar to the fear of Pharaoh that seems to motivate Jochebed.

Telephus

The abandonment of Telephus derives from an illegitimate pregnancy:

Heracles returned into Arcadia, and when he stopped at the house of Aleos the king, he lay secretly with his daughter Auge, impregnated her (τῇ θυγατρὶ τούτου λάθρα μίγεις Αὐγή καὶ ταύτην ποιήσας ἔγκυον), and went back to Stymphalus. Aleos was ignorant of what had happened, but when the bulk of the child in the womb betrayed the violation of his daughter he asked who had violated her (ὥς ὁ τῆς γαστρὸς ὄγκος ἐμήνυσε τὴν φορὰν, ἐζήτει τὸν φθείραντα). When Auge said it was Heracles who

had done violence to her (ὅτι βιάσαιτο αὐτὴν Ἡρακλῆς), he would not believe what she had said, but gave her into the hands of Nauplius his friend with orders to drown her in the sea. But as Auge was being led off to Nauplia and was near Mount Parthenium, she felt herself overcome by the birthpangs and withdrew to a nearby thicket as if to perform a certain necessary act. There she gave birth to a male child, and hiding the babe in some bushes, she left it there (τεκοῦσα δὲ παιδίον ἄρρεν ἀπέλιπε τὸ βρέφος εἰς τινὰς θάμνους κρύψασα). After doing this, Auge went back to Nauplius.

(4.33)

Heracles rapes Auge. At first the language is more generic to describe Heracles 'laying with' her, but then she is twice described as 'violated,' which means either that she was seduced or raped, but in either case 'ruined' and no longer a virgin. Finally, when she cannot conceal the evidence of her pregnancy, she tells her father that Heracles raped her. Her father either does not believe that the father is Heracles or does not believe her claim of rape (or both). Since he condemns her to die, he likely thinks that she voluntarily surrendered her virginity and therefore dishonored and disobeyed him. His punishment could not be more severe. Just as parents sometimes abandon infants by handing them over to others to expose, Aleos hands his pregnant daughter over to Nauplius to be drowned in the sea. She secretly gives birth and abandons her baby because she has no hope that she will live or that the child can live if attached to her. As it happens, Nauplius gives her to Carriars traveling to Asia, and her baby is raised by herdsmen. Telephus is a male child without disability born into a wealthy family, but the illegitimacy of the pregnancy leads to his abandonment. Auge would be happy to keep her baby and strives to protect him by abandoning him. Auge's father seeks to punish her with death for her illegitimate pregnancy, although he conveys this task to a trusted agent.

Agathocles

The birth story of Agathocles reflects differing investments made by his mother and father:

Carcinus of Rhegium, an exile from his native city, settled in Therma in Sicily, a city that had been brought under the rule of the Carthaginians. After becoming entangled with a woman of the region and impregnating her, he was constantly troubled in his sleep (ἐμπλακεῖς δὲ τῶν ἐγχωρίων τινὶ γυναικὶ καὶ ποιήσας αὐτὴν ἔγκθον συνεχῶς κατὰ τοὺς ὕπνους ἐταράττετο). Since he was anxious about the begetting of the child (διόπερ ἀγωνίων ὑπὲρ τῆς παιδοποιίας), he instructed some Carthaginian envoys who were setting out for Delphi to ask the god about his expected infant (βρέφος). They duly carried out their commission, and an oracle was given that the

child whom he had begotten would be the cause of great misfortunes (ὅτι μεγάλων ἀτυχημάτων ὁ γεννηθεὶς αἴτιος ἔσται) to the Carthaginians and all Sicily. Since he learned this and was frightened, Carcinus exposed the infant in a public place (ἃ δὴ πυθόμενος καὶ φοβηθεὶς ἐξέθηκε τὸ παιδίον δημοσίᾳ) and set men to watch him that he might die (ἵνα τελευτήσῃ παρακατέστησεν). After some days had passed it had not died, and those who had been set to watch him began to be negligent. At this time, then, the mother came secretly by night and took the child (τὸ παιδίον); and, since she feared her husband (φοβουμένη τὸν ἄνδρα), she did not bring him into her own home, but left him with her brother Heracleides and called him Agathocles, the name of her own father.

(Diod. 19.2)

A negative prophecy motivates the abandonment of the infant. Carcinus exposes the infant in a public place rather than the wilderness, evidently not willing to take any chances that the baby might be rescued and grow to fulfill the prophecy. His (unnamed) mother, however, undermines the attempt to kill her baby. She may be the wife of Carcinus. The term ‘entangled’ is an unusual choice for a marriage, but illegitimacy does not appear to be a concern, and the couple are together seven years later when Carcinus joyfully recognizes his son. Carcinus has unexplained anxiety about the unborn child that motivates his inquiry to Delphi, which inspires fear about the ruinous future of the child. He exposes the child for the good of the larger community, but the infant’s mother disagrees with the decision. She has the support of her brother, who shelters the child. Ultimately, Carnius regrets exposing the child and is reunited with him through the mother when he is seven years old. In adulthood, Agathocles involves Sicily, Carthage, and southern Italy in numerous expensive and fruitless wars. None of the usual reasons for abandoning an infant apply to Agathocles. He is a male child without disability born legitimately into a wealthy royal family. The prophecy that he will ruin the social and political order causes his father to decide that the best course of action is to make sure he dies. He posts guards around the abandoned baby to make sure the child is not rescued and adopted, but he does not directly kill the baby or order anyone to do so.

Pseudo-Apollodorus

The *Bibliotheca* was attributed to Apollodorus of Athens, who lived in the second century BCE, but dates to a later time, so the author is sometimes called Pseudo-Apollodorus. Unlike the work of Diodorus, the *Bibliotheca* is almost complete and consists of three books that narrate from early mythological times to the return of the heroes from the Trojan War. The last part of the work is missing; it breaks off abruptly during the story of Theseus. It is much shorter than Diodorus’s work and the prose is comparatively terse. It has long been prized as a native compendium of Greek mythology.

Zeus

The birth of Zeus appears in a context of infanticide:

[Chronos] married his sister Rhea. Since Gaia and Ouranos foretold to him that by his own child he would be robbed of dominion (ὕπὸ παιδὸς ἰδίου τὴν ἀρχὴν ἀφαιρεθήσεσθαι), he would swallow his offspring when they were born. His firstborn Hestia he swallowed, then Demeter and Hera, and after them Pluto and Poseidon. Enraged (ὀργισθεῖσα) at this, Rhea went to Crete when she was big with Zeus and gave birth to him in a cave in Dicte. She gave him to the Curetes and to the nymphs Adrastia and Ida, daughters of Melisseus, to nurse. These nymphs fed the child (παῖδα) on the milk of Amalthea and the Curetes in arms guarded the babe (βρέφος) in the cave, banging their spears on their shields so that Chronos might not hear the child's sound (τοῦ παιδὸς φωνῆς). But Rhea wrapped a stone in swaddling clothes and gave it to Chronos to swallow as if it were a newborn baby (γεγεννημένον παῖδα).

(I.i.6–7)

The story of Zeus's infancy is an unusual combination of abandonment story and rescue story. Chronos would destroy Zeus with his older siblings, but Rhea rescues him by entrusting him to the care of helpers who conceal the baby from Zeus. The tale seems similar to an abandonment story in which Rhea entrusts her son to others because the support she might expect from her husband is replaced by active malice toward her children. Chronos's animosity, in turn, derives from a negative prophecy. The real danger to Zeus comes from his father, who would directly kill him, so his mother's abandonment is more like an adoption since she has ensured the safety of her baby. None of the usual motives for abandonment obtain in this example, since the male child has no disability and is born legitimately into a family with resources. The adverse prophecy alone drives Chronos to consume his children, but his act enrages Rhea who works to save her children and doom her husband.

Pelias and Neleus

Tyro abandons her twin sons Pelias and Neleus.

Tyro daughter of Salmoneus and Alceidice was brought up by Cretheus brother of Salmoneus, and conceived a passion (ἔρωτα ἴσχει) for the river Enipeus, and she would constantly go to the waters of the stream and lament. But Poseidon in the likeness of Enipeus lay with her (συγκατεκλίθη αὐτῇ), and she secretly gave birth to twin sons, whom she exposed (γεννήσασα κρύφα διδύμους παῖδας ἐκτίθησιν).

(Ps.-Apol. 1.8)

As often, Apollodorus's narrative is terse. Tyro may conceal her pregnancy and abandon her sons because she somehow discovers Poseidon's deception, but even if she believes Enipeus is the father, she may be ashamed of the illegitimacy of her pregnancy. Her family circumstances are similarly opaque, but Apollodorus narrates that when her sons are grown, they rediscover their mother, and kill her stepmother Sidero 'for they found out that she was mistreating Tyro.' Sidero's mistreatment may have influenced Tyro's decision to conceal her pregnancy and abandon her sons, but Apollodorus is unclear about the chronology, and Sidero may have married Tyro's father at a later date. Tyro seems to be from a wealthy family and gives birth to a male child without disability. The only discernible motive for abandoning her infant is its illegitimacy, which applies whether or not she knows that Poseidon is really the father.

Perseus

A prophecy endangers the baby Perseus:

When Acrisius inquired of the oracle how he should get male children (παίδων γενέσεως ἀρρένων), the god said that his daughter would give birth to a child (παῖδα) who would kill him. Since he was afraid (δείσας), Acrisius built a brazen chamber under ground and there guarded Danae. Some say Proteus seduced (ἔφθειρε) her, whence arose the quarrel between them, but some say that Zeus had intercourse (συνῆλθεν) with her in the shape of a stream of gold which poured through the roof into Danae's lap. When Acrisius afterwards learned Perseus was born to her, he would not believe that she had been seduced (ἐφθάρθαι) by Zeus, and putting his daughter with the child in a chest, he cast it into the sea (τὴν θυγατέρα μετὰ τοῦ παιδὸς εἰς λάρνακα βαλὼν ἔρριπεν εἰς θάλασσαν).

(Ps.-Apol. 2.4.1)

Acrisius evidently assumes that both his daughter and grandson will die, eliminating the danger posed by Perseus and the risk of his daughter bearing another son. Instead, the chest washes ashore at Seriphos and Dictys raises Perseus with Danae. Perseus eventually kills Acrisius by accidentally hitting him with a discus during a pentathlon. In this case, the grandfather of the child decides to abandon him due to a negative prophecy, and he exposes his daughter along with him. Danae has no interest in exposing her son, but suffers along with him. The sole motivation for the exposure is the prophecy that Perseus will kill Acrisius. Danae's pregnancy is illegitimate (she is not married), but the prophecy seems to drive the exposure independent of the circumstances of the pregnancy. By comparison, there is no prophecy about Telephus (in the story as told by both Diodorus and Apollodorus); the illegitimacy of the pregnancy drives the abandonment. In the case of Perseus, the remark that Acrisius would not believe that his daughter was seduced by Zeus

raises the question of whether he would have spared her if he had believed her. If so, would he have still spared Zeus's child, prophesied to kill his grandfather? This prophecy motivates his great effort to keep his daughter childless and his anger at his failure. The use of a chest cast into the sea resembles Jochebed's construction of an 'ark' for baby Moses. Like Moses, Perseus is loved and wanted by his mother.

Telephus

Apollodorus twice narrates the abandonment of Telephus:

On his way past Tegea, Herakles deflowered (ἔφθειρεν) Auge without realizing that she was the daughter of Aleus. She gave birth to her infant (βρέφος) in secret and placed (κατέθετο) it in the temenos of Athena. Since the land was being ravished by a pestilence, Aleus entered the temenos and there discovered the evidence of his daughter's labor. He exposed (ἐξέθετο) the infant (βρέφος) on Mt. Parthenius, but by divine providence, it was saved, for a doe that had just given birth suckled it, and shepherds retrieved it and called it Telephus. Aleus gave Auge to Poseidon's son Nauplius to sell abroad, and he gave her to Teuthras, the lord of Teuthrania, who married her.

(II.146–147)

Now Auge, after being deflowered (φθαρεῖσα) by Herakles, secreted her infant (κατέκρυψε τὸ βρέφος) in the temenos of Athena where she was a priestess. But when the land became barren and remained that way, and the oracles disclosed that there was an unholiness (δυσσέβια) in the temenos of Athena, Auge's act was brought to light, and she was handed over by her father to Nauplius for execution. Nauplius gave her to Teuthras, lord of the Mysians, who married her. Her baby (βρέφος) he exposed (ἐκτεθὲν) on Mt. Parthenius and it grabbed on to the teat of a doe, and was called Telephus. After being raised by the herdsmen of Corythus, he went to Delphi in search of his parents (γονέας). When he learned from the god who they were, he made his way to Mysia where he became Teuthras's adopted son and heir to his rule at his death.

(III.103–104)

The versions agree that Heracles deflowered Auge, the daughter of Aleus. The text does not clarify whether Auge consents to sex with Heracles or not (recall that Diodorus presents it as a rape). Either way, her pregnancy is illegitimate, and she gives birth in secret and leaves the baby in the temenos of Athena, since she is a priestess. Aleus discovers the evidence of his daughter's labor in the temenos, and then exposes the infant. In both stories, Aleus's action is described with the term for exposing an infant: ἐκτίθμι,

but Auge's action is described with different vocabulary: κατατίθημι ('to place, put down') and κατακρύψω ('to hide'), both terms that recall the actions of Moses's mother. Auge's actions show care and concern for her child. She may strive to protect the child from exposure, although her intent is unclear. Auge conceals her pregnancy and labor because her pregnancy is illegitimate and she may anticipate how her father will react. He both exposes his grandson and hands over his daughter to Nauplius to be executed or sold abroad (depending on the version), but Nauplius gives her to Teuthras, who marries her. Auge loves her son and would keep him; her father reacts by seeking to kill both her and the baby as punishment for the illegitimacy of the pregnancy.

Zethus and Amphion

Antiope became pregnant by Zeus:

Antiope was a daughter of Nycteus, and Zeus lay (συνῆλθεν) with her. When she was pregnant, her father threatened her, so she ran away to Epopeus at Sicyon and was married to him. Broken in spirit (ἄθυμῆσας), Nycteus killed himself, after charging Lycus to punish Epopeus and Antiope. Lycus marched against Sicyon, subdued it, slew Epopeus and led Antiope away captive. On the way, she gave birth to two children (δυο γεννᾷ παῖδας) at Eleurethae in Boeotia where they were exposed (έκκειμ ένους).

(Ps.-Apol. 3.5.5)

Lycus and his wife imprison and mistreat Antiope until one day her chains fall loose, and she escapes and providentially discovers her sons Zethus and Amphion, who had been rescued and raised by a herdsman. Her sons avenge her mistreatment by killing Nycteus and his wife. Antiope clearly desires to keep her children and would have raised them in Sicyon with her husband Epopeus. But her father's reaction to her pregnancy is catastrophic. He threatens her, so she flees. His spirit is broken by his daughter's illegitimate pregnancy and perhaps also her escape, so he kills himself after arranging for her to be punished. Lycus takes up Nycteus's animosity toward Antiope and ensures that her infant is exposed. As in other cases of pregnancy by Zeus, the question of Antiope's consent is obscure, but her pregnancy is illegitimate in either case, which motivates her escape attempt and her father's rage. The illegitimacy of the pregnancy is complicated by her marriage to Epopeus, which legitimizes the child. Nycteus's reaction suggests a father shattered by his daughter's unchastity, unmoved by her marriage, and feeling his own honor irreparably damaged. Even after his own death, he wants her killed along with her child and husband. As in other cases, the illegitimacy of her pregnancy, even though redeemed by marriage, provides the only reason for abandoning a male child without disability born into a family with resources.

Oedipus

Laius is warned that his son will kill him, so he does not have sex with his wife.

The oracle had warned [Laius] not to procreate (μὴ γεννᾶν), for the one begotten (τὸν γεννηθέντα) would become a parricide. Nevertheless, flushed with wine, he lay with his wife. When it was born he gave it to a herdsman to expose (τὸ γεννηθὲν ἐκθεῖναι δίδωσι νομεῖ) after he pierced the child's ankles with brooches. The herdsman exposed it (ἐξέθηκεν) on Cithaeron.
(Ps.-Apol. 3.5.7)

The text does not state the perspective of Oedipus's mother. The only reason Laius exposes his son is the prophecy, which comes to pass anyway when father and son meet as strangers, fight, and Oedipus famously and unwittingly kills his father and weds his mother. The pregnancy is legitimate and the baby is born without disabilities (his ankles are pieced after the decision to abandon him) to royal parents. None of the typical motives to abandon obtain, but the prophecy provides sufficient reason.

Atalanta

The story of Atalanta reflects a sex preference for male children:

Iasus had a daughter Atalanta by Clymene, daughter of Minyas. Her father exposed her since he desired male children (ταύτης ὁ πατήρ ἀρρένων παίδων). A she-bear came often and gave her suck until hunters found her and raised her among themselves.

(Ps.-Apol. 3.9.2)

The narrative says little about Atalanta's parents. Apollodorus records multiple names for both her father and mother, but indicates agreement among sources that both parents come from royalty. Poverty does not motivate the abandonment, but only her sex. The text says nothing about her mother's attitude to the birth, but her father does not want a girl (lit. 'female thing') and would rather have 'male children.' Apollodorus's language seems to reflect the attitude of Iasus. Atalanta is not a 'girl' or 'daughter,' but 'this feminine thing.' In some contexts, girls are devalued because they are regarded as more expensive than boys and offer less return on parental investment. Atalanta's parents would appear to be wealthy enough not to be so influenced by this consideration, but Iasus exposes his daughter and his wife's response is invisible. The narrative excludes pressure motivating Iasus. The decision is his alone and motivated by his own preference for male children, which the wider culture accepts. Atalanta discovers her parents in her adulthood and resists her father's efforts to get her to marry. The story is narrowly focused on sex preference for sons, since the girl is legitimately born without disability into a wealthy household. Wealthier families are generally more likely to favor sons over daughters.

Paris

Priam exposes one of his sons:

When a second child was about to be born, Hecuba dreamed she had brought forth a firebrand and that the fire spread over the whole city and burned it. When Priam learned of the dream from Hecuba, he sent for his son Aesacus, for he was an interpreter of dreams, having been taught by his mother's father Merops. He declared that the child was begotten to be the ruin of his country and advised that the baby should be exposed (οὗτος εἰπὼν τῆς πατρίδος γενέσθαι τὸν παῖδα ἀπώλειαν, ἐκθεῖναι τὸ βρέφος ἐκλέλεθε). When the babe was born, Priam gave it to a servant to take and expose on Ida (Πρίαμος δέ, ὡς ἐγεννήθη τὸ βρέφος, δίδωσιν ἐκθεῖναι οἰκέτη κομίσαντι εἰς Ἴδην).

(ps.-Apol. 3.12.5)

The servant raises the child after it survives five days, and Paris later becomes recognized to his parents. His mother's dream condemns Paris to exposure. The fact that Hecuba reports her dream suggests that she might agree with the decision, but the text identifies only Aesacus and Priam explicitly as those endorsing exposure. His mother's dream and its interpretation are the only reason Paris, a male child born legitimately and without disability into a wealthy royal family, is exposed. The prophecy resembles that concerning Agathocles told by Diodorus in that both children represent a threat not merely to one kinsman (as Zeus, Perseus, and Oedipus), but their entire societies. Even in these extreme cases, the resolution is abandonment rather than direct killing. The abandonment is further entrusted to an agent, increasing Priam's uncertainty about the infant's fate, whereas Carcinus makes more effort to ensure the death of Agathocles given the gravity of the prophecy. In both cases, the fathers who abandon the children later rejoice to be reunited with them despite the prophecies, which do come to pass. Note that in all five stories involving negative prophecies (Agathocles, Zeus, Perseus, Oedipus, and Paris), the prophecy alone drives the abandonment (although Perseus is born illegitimately, the prophecy motivates the abandonment).

Comparative perspective

Interesting correlations and divergences emerge in the comparisons among empirically grounded risk factors for infant abandonment, Hebrew infant abandonment stories, and Greek infant abandonment stories.

Social reality indicates that female babies are at higher risk of being abandoned. Almost all infant abandonment stories, however, concern male babies. In these stories, the baby is always rescued and grows up to become an important figure, so the gender imbalance favoring male babies reflects the greater narrative interest in male characters. In two Greek stories, an infant is

abandoned for the sole reason that it is female (Cybelle, Atalanta). Both girls are born to kings, and the preference for male children is generally stronger among wealthier classes. A third female infant is abandoned (Semiramis), but the circumstances indicate that the baby would have been abandoned whether male or female. The metaphorical tale of Jerusalem abandoned as an infant reflects the reality of unwanted female children, but the circumstances of her birth are unclear since the story is told only from the perspective of the person (God) who finds her. God knows only her Canaanite heritage, as Pharaoh's daughter knows only that Moses is Hebrew. The Hebrew and Greek stories reflect the opposite gender imbalance known as social reality. Boys may have been more likely to be rescued, although data is lacking. In the stories, rescued infants have reasonably happy childhoods as free adopted children who are sometimes reunited with their birth mothers, but historical evidence from Greece indicates that rescued infants were often raised as slaves.²²

Illegitimate pregnancy is a major risk factor for infant abandonment, and the Greek stories reflect this social reality. Across cultures, illegitimate pregnancies tend to lack social support. The community often declines to help raise a child that has no father. They may refuse the additional burden that a missing father implies and seek to deter illegitimate pregnancies by punishing them, with the full weight of that punishment falling on the women. Only the Greek stories include examples of illegitimate pregnancies. Both Jochebed and Hagar have legitimate children and keep them for months after birth. In some Greek stories, the mother conceals her pregnancy and disposes of the child due to the illegitimacy of her pregnancy (Semiramis, Pelias and Neleus). The motivation of these mothers becomes clearer considering what happens to women whose illegitimate pregnancies are discovered. Antiope, pregnant with Zethus and Amphion, flees her father who asks his friend Lycus to kill her before killing himself. Lycus keeps her in prison after she manages to give birth secretly and expose her children. Danae receives comparably harsh treatment from her father when she becomes pregnant with Perseus. He places both his daughter and grandchild in a chest and casts it into the sea. Auge conceals her pregnancy and gives birth in secret, but her father discovers the baby and exposes it, then sells his daughter. The extremely severe punishments these women suffer from their own fathers explains why the other women seek to conceal their pregnancies. The stories reflect a culture in which illegitimate pregnancies could be severely punished and the infants exposed. Although some mothers anticipate the reaction and abandon their own illegitimate infants (Semiramis, Pelias and Neleus, Telephus [all versions]), the decision to abandon is often made by the father of the mother (Perseus, Zethus and Amphion, Telephus [all versions]). Children born to married women in the stories may be abandoned by their fathers due to adverse prophecies (Agathocles, Oedipus, Paris), because the child is female (Cybele, Atalanta), or by their mother for fear of persecution (Heracles).

Poverty of the parents can increase the likelihood that an infant will be abandoned. In both Hebrew stories, the abandonment is motivated exclusively

by difficult maternal circumstances. In both cases, the mothers clearly desire to keep their babies, but abandon them due to circumstantial distress deriving in part from their status as slaves. Jochebed lives in harsh slavery and under the threat that her child will be murdered, yet still strives to hide him at first. Hagar experiences harsh rejection from her community and is cast into exile without the means for survival. By contrast, none of the Greek stories involve poor families. Indeed, the families are often royal, suggesting they have the means to raise their children. The royal heritage of many of the infants enhances their status (Cybelle, Heracles, Telephus, Agathocles, Perseus, Zethus and Amphion, Oedipus, Paris, and possibly Atalanta). The Greek stories focus on heroes and nobles who are born into high-status families and must be abandoned for reasons other than poverty. The Hebrew stories reflect women in humble circumstances whose children will become heroes through divine election.

None of the infants in the stories have any visible defects. Oedipus's ankles are wounded by his father before being exposed, and Pelias is bruised by a horse after being exposed. None of the infants, however, have any defect that contributes to the decision to abandon them. In the Greek world, it seems that infants with visible defects were routinely dispatched, but this may have accounted for a small percentage of abandoned babies. The infant abandonment stories concern infants who were rescued and often grew to be heroes, so disability may have been regarded as an unsuitable trait. Indeed, often the infants are described as particularly beautiful or viable, which partially explains their rescue.²³ Moses is likewise a cute and viable baby, and both he and Ishmael cry when abandoned, indicating their vigor.

In the Greek stories only, negative prophecy often motivates the abandonment of the child. Greek literature is filled with stories about prophecy that cannot be avoided, and this theme appears in several infant abandonment stories (Agathocles, Perseus, Oedipus, Paris). The prophecy indicates that the child is a threat to the father (Oedipus), grandfather (Perseus), or the whole community (Agathocles, Paris). The father and grandfather of Oedipus and Perseus, respectively, make the decision to abandon due to the threat the child poses to themselves, but the prophecy comes to pass anyway. Agathocles and Paris are interesting cases because the prophecy threatens the wider community. Agathocles's mother works against her husband's attempt to expose the baby until it dies, but Hecuba may be more cooperative with Priam's decision to expose Paris. In both cases, however, the fathers welcome the children back into the family despite the adverse prophecies. In all the abandonment stories, direct killing of an infant is not an option. Even Agathocles and Paris, who pose a grave threat to the community, are not therefore directly killed, but exposed as infants that are simply unwanted as opposed to feared. Sometimes the parents are further removed from infanticide by employing an agent to carry out the abandonment (Oedipus, Paris). Note that in both these cases, the pregnancy is legitimate. In illegitimate pregnancies, the father of the mother may entrust someone else to

execute his daughter (Telephus, Zethus and Amphion). One textual variant separates Jochebed from exposing Moses by having her maidservant perform this task. The exclusive use of indirect methods and the occasional inclusion of agents serve to separate infant abandonment from infanticide. The former is more or less ethically acceptable in the cultures, and the second strictly forbidden.

The narratives frequently fail to clarify whether the pregnancies are a result of seduction or rape. In the Hebrew narrative, the pregnancy of Hagar is considered legitimate, but her consent is never clarified. The Hebrew and Greek stories reflect a culture in which this distinction was not as important as it is in modern Western societies. None of the Greek stories involving illegitimate pregnancy reflect affirmative consent, which saves the characters of their mothers in the eyes of the reader, even if not in the eyes of their fathers. In several cases, the mothers were deceived. Aphrodite tricks the goddess Derceto, mother of Semiramis, into having sex with an obscure man and Zeus has sex with Alcmena, mother of Heracles, by appearing in the form of her husband. Poseidon pretends to be Enipeus so that he can have sex with Tyro, whose pregnancy would have been illegitimate even if Enipeus were the father of Pelias and Neleus. Danae, the mother of Perseus, becomes pregnant, but Apollodorus offers two versions: she was either seduced by her uncle or molested by Zeus. Zeus lays with Antiope, mother of Zethus and Amphion, which may or may not involve consent. The story of Telephus is told once by Diodorus and twice by Apollodorus. Diodorus's version most explicitly clarifies that Heracles raped Auge, but her father would not believe her and tried to kill her. The lack of affirmative consent in these stories present the mothers as victims and therefore as more sympathetic to readers. By extension, their children are not the offspring of women disgraced by their own conduct, so the more positive characterization of the mother provides the child with a better pedigree. The powerlessness of the women also evokes sympathy for their suffering and, by extension, undermines societal punishment of unwed mothers.

The lack of sexual consent on the part of many of the mothers raises the question of their role in the abandonment of the infant. The texts often decline to answer this question just as they are silent on the question of consent. Some mothers are clearly reluctant to abandon their infants. The mother of Telephus (in all versions) appears willing to keep her baby, even hiding it in both versions of Apollodorus. Alcmena might keep Heracles but for the danger posed by a jealous Hera. Danae never seeks to abandon her baby, but is herself cast into the sea by her father, and Antiope went to considerable lengths to protect herself and her twin sons Zethus and Amphion. The narratives present these mothers as reluctant to abandon their babies, which shields their characters from being perceived as unfeeling and their infants for the suspicion of being undesirable or unworthy of investment. Most narratives omit the mother's perspective as the fathers or grandfathers make the decision to abandon. Hecuba is an ambiguous case, since she

reports to Priam a dream that leads to the abandonment of her infant Paris. The deliberative process omits her input, but her dream report may indicate her concern and potential willingness to abandon her son. Both Hebrew narratives clearly depict the mothers of Moses and Ishmael as desiring to keep them, which presents the women as invested mothers and the babies as worthy of that investment.

Conclusion

Literature, and perhaps especially historiography, has a mimetic quality. Even though none of the narratives studied here are straightforward accounts of ‘what really happened,’ the way the stories are told reflect the cultural assumptions and worldviews of the authors and their intended audiences. The relationship between the stories and historical reality appear in the similarities and differences in motives for infant abandonment reflected in the stories and known historically from other evidence. Illegitimacy appears as the most common motive for infant abandonment in the Greek stories, accounting for half of all cases (six of thirteen, counting the two version in Apollodorus as one), and the unwed mothers sometimes face execution by their own fathers. This focus on illegitimacy reflects social reality in which unwed mothers faced significant pressure to abandon their infants due to personal and familial shame and unwillingness of the community to help raise the child. Adverse prophecy about the infant emerges as the second most common reason for infant abandonment in the Greek stories (four of thirteen), although it seems to have been rarely if ever a reason to abandon a child. Instead, infant abandonment stories provide excellent opportunities for writers to reflect the Greek fascination with prophecy and its inevitable fulfillment. The sex of the baby provides the third most common motive (two of thirteen) for infant abandonment. Historically, it may have been a much more common motive, but also differentiated among social classes, with poor families favoring girls and wealthier families favoring boys. All of the stories concern wealthy families. The case of Heracles is unique because the married mother would keep the child except for her fear of Hera’s jealousy. Poverty and disability never emerge as motives in the Greek stories even though both were common reasons to abandon babies in the Greek world. The narratives focus on wealthy and illustrious families and the (mostly male) heroes born into them. Poverty and disability as motives for infant abandonment are known from non-narrative sources and appear to have been common.

The Hebrew stories reflect a different culture and story world. Although Hebrew literature also shows an interest in prophecy and fulfillment, it does not appear in either infant abandonment story. Illegitimacy, so common in Greek stories, does not appear in Hebrew narrative. In both Hebrew stories, the abandoned infants are male children born legitimately and abandoned due to the difficult circumstances of the enslaved and impoverished mothers, each of whom has suffered some persecution: Jochebed from Pharaoh’s genocidal

command, and Hagar from the rejection by Sarah and Abraham. The Hebrew narrative focus on low-status families that produce important leaders who require no illustrious pedigree as in the Greek tales. Both Hebrew stories emphasize the love the mothers have for their infants and the reluctance and sorrow with which they abandon them. In some Greek stories, the mothers similarly desire their children but are overruled and overpowered by others (Telephus, Agathocles, Zethus and Amphion). In most cases, however, the mother's feelings are not narrated and most Greek stories read as somewhat clinical or unemotional compared to the Hebrew tales, perhaps reflecting a Greek world in which abandonment was common and acceptable. The Hebrew stories, by comparison, seek to show the abandonment as a necessary act and last resort of a good and loving mother. They appear to reflect a cultural environment in which infant abandonment is not as acceptable as in the Greek world, but rather a more 'pro-natal' culture consistent with the Jewish (and later Christian) ethical objection to infant abandonment that emerges clearly in the Greco-Roman world. This pro-natal culture may be inherited from earlier pre-exilic Judaism from which these infant abandonment stories may date. In short, the several differences between Greek and Hebrew stories may reflect diverse evaluations of the ethical acceptability of infant abandonment in the Greek and Hebrew worlds. The ethical evaluations appear more clearly in later literature in which Jews and Christians object to the pagan practice of infant abandonment.²⁴ The stories of Jochebed and Hagar did not serve to legitimate infant abandonment for Jews and Christians, but rather reflected the ethically fraught nature of the act, mitigated by the extreme circumstances of the two mothers. A reading of all the infant abandonment stories indicates the importance of the cultural and familial environment for the decision to keep or reject a newborn. No story shows a mother making a free and independent decision, but all reflect significant constraints imposed by the wider social network that constrain the mother's actions or even render her the object of others' actions. In all cases, the village does not want the child, and the narratives reflect the darker side of humans as 'cooperative breeders.'

Notes

- 1 The origins of the proverb are obscure. See Joel Goldberg, 'It Takes a Village to Determine the Origins of an African Proverb,' NPR (July 30, 2016), www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2016/07/30/487925796/it-takes-a-village-to-determine-the-origins-of-an-african-proverb.
- 2 Marcia J. Bunge (ed.), *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001); John McKeown, *God's Babies: Natalism and Bible Interpretation in Modern America* (Cambridge: Open Book, 2014); Ronald R. Rindfuss and Minja Kim Chloe (eds.), *Low and Lower Fertility: Variations across Developed Countries* (New York: Springer, 2015).
- 3 Michelle Oberman, 'Mothers Who Kill: Cross-Cultural Patterns in and Perspectives on Contemporary Maternal Filicide,' *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 26 (2003): 493–514.

- 4 David A. Bosworth, *Infant Weeping in Akkadian, Hebrew, and Greek Literature* (Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible 8; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016). My work draws on the psychology of parent-child relationships that seems critical to childhood studies. See also Bosworth, 'Understanding Grief and Reading the Bible,' in *Mixed Feelings and Vexed Passions in Biblical Literature: Emotions of Divine and Human Figures in Interdisciplinary Perspective* (ed. Scott Spencer; RBS 90; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2017); Bosworth, 'Ancient Prayers and the Psychology of Religion: Deities as Parental Figures,' *JBL* 134 (2015): 681–700; Bosworth 'Faith and Resilience: King David's Reaction to the Death of Bathsheba's Firstborn,' *CBQ* 73 (2011): 691–707; Bosworth, "'David Comforted Bathsheba": Gender and Parental Bereavement,' in *Seitenblicke: Literarische und historische Studien zu Nebenfiguren im zweiten Samuelbuch* (ed. Walter Dietrich; Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 249; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 238–255. For a longer list of examples of infant abandonment stories from multiple cultures, see Donald B. Redford, 'The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child (Cf. Ex. ii 1–10),' *Numen* 14 (1967): 209–228.
- 5 Bosworth, *Infant Weeping*, 6–10; Melvin Konnor, *The Evolution of Childhood: Relationships, Emotion, Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 426; Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mother Nature: Maternal Instincts and How They Shape the Human Species* (New York: Ballantine, 1999), 288–317.
- 6 Cynthia Patterson, "'Not Worth the Rearing": The Causes of Infant Exposure in Ancient Greece,' *TAPA* 115 (1985): 103–123; Judith Evans Grubbs, 'Infant Exposure and Infanticide,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 83–107, esp. 84–92; Emiel Eyben, 'Family Planning in Greco-Roman Antiquity,' *Ancient Society* 11–12 (1980–81): 5–82.
- 7 Hrdy, *Mother Nature*, 318–350.
- 8 Dvora Filon, et al., 'Determining the Sex of Infanticide Victims from the Late Roman Era through Ancient DNA Analysis,' *Journal of Archeological Science* 25 (1998): 861–865.
- 9 David F. Lancy, *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 33.
- 10 Bosworth, *Infant Weeping*, 8; John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988); Mark Johnson (ed.), *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives and Child Murder and Concealment, 1550–2000* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).
- 11 Bosworth, *Infant Weeping*, 88–90.
- 12 The baby's role in his salvation was the focus of my prior study. On Moses, see Bosworth, *Infant Weeping*, 68–71.
- 13 Morton Cogan, 'A Technical Term for Exposure,' *JNES* 27 (1968): 133–135; Monica J. Melanchthon, *Rejection by God: The History and Significance of the Rejection Motif in the Hebrew Bible* (Studies in Biblical Literature 22; New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 36.
- 14 J.M. Allain, 'Infanticide as Slave Resistance: Evidence from Barbados, Jamaica, and Saint-Domingue,' *Inquiries Journal* 6 (2014), retrieved from www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=893.
- 15 BHS and several scholars emend the text in an effort to resolve this problem. See Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; Macon, GA: Mercer University

- Press, 1997), 27; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 16–36* (trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 337; Gergardt von Rad, *Genesis* (re. ed.; trans. John H. Marks; OTL; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1972), 228. For a critique of this emendation, see Larry L. Lyke, ‘Where does “the Boy” Belong?: Compositional Strategy in Genesis 21:24,’ *CBQ* 56 (1994): 637–647.
- 16 Bosworth, *Infant Weeping*, 83–85.
- 17 Jonathan Cohen, *The Origins and Evolution of the Moses Nativity Story* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 5.
- 18 On ancient Near Eastern laws pertinent to this situation, see Bosworth, *Infant Weeping*, 79–83.
- 19 Bosworth, *Infant Weeping*, 83.
- 20 In quotations below, the Greek text and English translation (sometimes modified) are taken from Charles H. Oldfather (trans.), Diodorus, *The Library of History* (12 vols.; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933–1935).
- 21 Trans. of Apollodorus modified from James G. Frazer, Apollodorus, *The Library* (2 vols.; LCL; New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1921).
- 22 W.V. Harris, ‘Demography, Geography, and the Sources of the Roman Slave Trade,’ *Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999): 62–75; Christian Laes, ‘Infants between Biological and Social Birth in Antiquity: A Phenomenon of the *Longue Durée*,’ *Historia* 63 (2014): 364–383.
- 23 This dimension was the focus of my prior study. See Bosworth, *Infant Weeping*, 93–111.
- 24 Erkki Koskenniemi, *The Exposure of Infants among Jews and Christians in Antiquity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009).

4 Failure to marry

Girling gone wrong

Kristine Henriksen Garroway

Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

(Gen 2:24)

Marriage was a divinely ordained social institution. Genesis 2:24 states that a man must leave his father and mother and establish a new family unit with his wife. But where did this wife come from and how did she become a wife? The Hebrew Bible (HB) provides many examples of how a wife could be obtained, but in most of the examples the woman simply appears on the scene.¹ Not much is said about her background between the time of her birth and marriage. Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) texts provide some more background through mythic stories, lexical lists, medical texts, and omen literature.² For a female, the life course was birth, life in the natal house, marriage, and motherhood. The period between birth and marriage was a time when a girl would learn what was expected of a woman in her culture, and a father would arrange for his daughter's marriage. The Mesopotamian legal corpus provides many different examples of this latter point, as marriage contracts list the father as the legal party responsible for the daughter.³ The mythic texts of the Inanna cycle, on the other hand, serve as an example of the overall life cycle.⁴ In the *Huluppu*-Tree she is a young woman who grows up and experiences sexual maturity, while in the Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi, she is married, and has children. Inanna's story is a bit unusual in that she is pursued by two lovers, and she alone picks whom she will marry. This contrasts with Mesopotamian marriage laws that suggest males arranged for a marriage. However, she does not act without consulting her family; she returns to her house and asks her mother for advice. Her mother, Ningal, approves of her choice and allows the marriage to go forward. In this way, Inanna serves as a model daughter; when faced with the opportunity to rebel or make her own decision, she instead follows cultural conventions and waits for her marriage to be properly blessed.

This essay explores the other end of the spectrum, a 'bizarro-world' wherein marriage is improperly facilitated. It examines biblical narratives where fathers do not facilitate a marriage for their daughters, and the subsequent (re)

actions of daughters when they are denied this rite of passage. In comparing these biblical texts against the standard procedure of marriage known from comparative Mesopotamian sources, this study reveals an attitude of discomfort on behalf of the biblical writers with teenage daughters of marriageable age. It concludes that this discomfort comes from a place of fear, because daughters had the agency, through marriage, reproduction, and socialisation of their own children, to change society.⁵ Such a deviation, in turn, would circle back to the father as having failed to properly socialise his daughter and perpetuate Israelite society through marriage and childbirth.

Childist interpretation

The choice to focus on children, and on teenage daughters specifically, is part of a childist interpretation, a newer approach to studying children in the biblical world.⁶ Its aims are similar to feminist interpretations in that it seeks to highlight a hidden and silent other, reassign a voice to this silent other, and point out bias in the text. Where it differs is in the focus. The hidden and silent other are, to state the obvious, children. Most work in the field of child-centered interpretation understands a child to be one who has not reached a state of biological or social maturation.⁷ A child belongs to the realm of dependents. Whereas feminist texts engage with the androcentric biases in a text, this childist interpretation explores the adult-centric biases found in the biblical text.⁸

Methodologically, childist interpretations both focus on a source, be it text or realia, and step back from the source. For this essay, a focused look at the text searches for new meaning. Stepping back, on the other hand, means looking at the narrative within a broader context, to see how the new reading impacts our understanding of children in the Bible. In focusing on both the narrow and broader pictures, child-centered interpretations are informed by a variety of theories including, but not limited to: literary, sociohistorical (including comparative literature), anthropological, archeological, gender, ethnographical, and sociological. Embracing multiple theories in a ‘coffee house’ style allows the interpreter to approach a source from multiple angles and to arrive at new conclusions.⁹ Sociohistorical criticism concentrating on socialisation, gendering, and enculturation will provide the framework for this essay.

Socialisation and gendering in the biblical world

‘Children are the future of a society and the ways in which they are brought up underline and perpetuate the beliefs ... of their communities.’¹⁰ As a child, aspects of cultural identity and proper cultural behaviors are learned through socialisation.¹¹ This process is the way in which a society passes on information that is needed to successfully recreate itself in the next generation. Deuteronomy 6:5–9 is a good example of socialisation in Israelite society: parents are to teach their children *hadevarim ha’eleh*. This phrase translates literally as ‘these words or things,’ but means ‘these values and beliefs,’ which were imparted by God

to the people of Israel. In a patriarchal society that emphasised the family unit over the individual, a premium was placed on raising children who were properly socialised.¹² Part of the socialisation process is learning gender. Proverbs 31:10–20 teaches that the perfectly gendered female is a mother, a wife, a provider of food, savvy in business; she is wise and revered, and brings honor to her husband's household.¹³ A girl was not simply given a list of things she must do, but rather, as Judith Butler argued, gender was performed for her. In turn, the girl would mirror these gender performances.¹⁴

This trickle-down attitude has been challenged with more recent theories viewing socialisation and gendering as 'a multifaceted phenomenon including different levels of interactions.'¹⁵ This has led to cognitive social learning theories, which hold that children play an active part in their own socialising.¹⁶

Children learn to conduct themselves in a manner deemed appropriate in a wide array of social settings by developing an understanding of these relationship (e.g., authority, friendships) and the transactions that serve to regulate, maintain, and transform these relationships (e.g., kindness, sharing, hostility).¹⁷

According to this theory, both children and adults play active roles in the process of socialisation and gendering.

Looking to the sociohistorical context in which the biblical text arose sheds further light on the process of how girls were socialised and gendered.¹⁸ Gender archeology asserts that women held a vital role in the household economic system.¹⁹ As mothers and wives, women cared for children, prepared food, spun, wove textiles, and carried out tasks related to the domestic religion.²⁰ For girls, one might call this entire process of socialising and gendering 'girling'; that is, learning how to become an Israelite woman.

Rites of passage

Marriage marks a transition from one stage of life to the next. In anthropological terms, such transitions are known as rites of passage, and comprise a literal or metaphorical three-part journey.²¹ Successfully passing through the journey allowed the initiate to gain new knowledge with which to reenter society. From an anthropological perspective, the start and finish of the journey are easy to see, but the middle part, the 'liminal' stage, is a bit murkier.²² Liminality represents a place of instability and fear connected with death, the womb, and invisibility. Those who are in the liminal stage are understood as dangerous and 'other.'²³

With respect to marriage, one might expect the before and after part of the journey to be easily identifiable within the biblical text: first a girl is unmarried and then, later, she is married. What one finds is that the HB does not include many texts about girls growing up in the natal house; this was not the goal of the biblical text. Written by an elite group of male authors and editors, their

target audience was the *male heads of the house*, the fathers.²⁴ Their aim was, among other things, to present an ideal of what an Israelite should be and how a family should operate. As such, the HB includes a lot of information regarding females after marriage, especially in the role of mothers: they bore the children who would inherit, become the next work force, provide elder care, and perpetuate religious and cultural values.²⁵ Texts addressing girls in ‘stage two’ (the liminal stage) who are on the precipice of becoming wives and mothers are also present. Yet, these texts are not positive, and they demonstrate a curious phenomenon. The texts about girls of a marriageable age do not describe proper gendering.²⁶ Instead, one finds texts describing girls who overstep the bounds of their gender roles, acting almost manly.

‘Zooming-in’: tales of warning and girling gone wrong

Let the maiden remain with us some ten days; then you may go ... Let us call the girl and ask for her reply.

(Gen 24:55, 57)

The Rebekah narrative, the first time in the HB that one sees a young girl of marriageable age, does not at first seem to display an attitude of discomfort with teenage girls. In fact, Rebekah’s character has been compared to that of Abraham. She agrees willingly to go on a journey to an unknown land.²⁷ Yet, there is something strange about the fact that her mother and brother ask her if she will agree to marry. Not only does she agree to the marriage, but she also agrees to leave as soon as possible. As previously mentioned, marriage throughout the ANE was an agreement between the father (or the girl’s legal guardian) and the bridegroom (or his guardian), not between the girl and the potential bridegroom.²⁸ Speiser navigated this anomaly by likening the marriage agreement seen in Genesis 24 to that of the *tuppi aḫātūti*, ‘sisterhood’ adoptions from Nuzi.²⁹ In such a contract the girl offers a declaration of consent to the marriage. However, the similarities between the Nuzi and Genesis marriages have been shown to be just that—similarities; Genesis does not employ the same marriage institutions.³⁰

As with the rest of the ANE, marriages in ancient Israel were contracts negotiated between the legal representatives of both parties (which, depending on circumstances, might have even been the young man himself).³¹ Rebekah’s consent remains unusual. One might understand this as a window into the ‘real’ way marriages happened.³² Perhaps a girl was more than an economic asset moved from one family to the next; she had a say in the matter.³³ As Baxter stated, children internalise social input given to them by adults and then ‘interpret, select, and appropriate ideas and behaviors in particular ways.’³⁴ Perhaps the inclusion of these verses was meant to demonstrate Rebekah’s impulsive nature. Looking forward to Rebekah’s actions later in Genesis, one finds a woman who is conniving, plays favorites, and dupes her husband (Gen 26:28, 27:5–17, 42–48). These verses in Genesis 24 call attention to the

power of female children to invoke societal change. Unchecked, and improperly ‘girled,’ a teenage girl left to speak her mind grows up into a woman who manipulates the course of Israelite history.

Now Dinah, daughter of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob, went out to encounter the daughters of the land.

(Gen 34:1)

Genesis 34:1 is the only verse in which Dinah acts. This verse identifies Dinah as the daughter of Leah, whom she had born to Jacob. Throughout the rest of the text, Dinah is called the daughter of Jacob, without any mention of Leah. In the ANE and biblical texts, a person was commonly identified by the father’s house.³⁵ This curious way of identifying Dinah by her mother bothered some of the earliest commentators of the biblical text. Rashi, a medieval biblical commentator, quotes Genesis Rabba 80:1, ‘because of her going out, she is called the “daughter of Leah.” For she [Leah] too, was an “outgoer,” as it is written, “And Leah went out to greet him”’ (Gen 30:16). Regarding her, it has been said, ‘Like mother, like daughter.’ From the outset, this looks like a condemnation of both Leah and Dinah. Dinah, like her mother, defied ANE social norms and went out unchaperoned. While Rashi does not articulate his argument in terms of socialisation, he is noting that children copy the gender performances they see modeled. The common interpretation that Dinah *went out*, here meaning to display ‘coquettish or promiscuous conduct,’ is based on the Akkadian and Aramaic cognates of the Hebrew verb with the root *yod-tsade-aleph*.³⁶ The Akkadian *wašû* means ‘to exhibit promiscuous behavior,’ and the Aramaic *naḥka’lh* means ‘she who goes out’ (i.e., a prostitute).

While modern scholars are quick to point to Rashi’s connection between Leah and Dinah to support *why* Dinah ‘went out,’ they fail to read on. Rashi states that the issue here is that Dinah should not have been withheld from the world, but that she should have been encouraged to encounter it. Her firm moral grounding, taught to her by her mother, would have made Dinah a positive influence.³⁷ Understood through the modern theories of socialisation and enculturation, Rashi again makes the argument that parents socialise their children.

From the perspective of ANE culture and girling gone wrong, the fault lies with Jacob. Jacob should have married Dinah before she had the chance to wander off. He should have married her so that she could have given birth to another generation of Israelites. Martha Roth’s seminal study on marriage ages in Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian marriage contracts demonstrated that girls were married between the ages of fourteen and twenty, and boys between twenty-six and thirty-two years of age.³⁸ It must also be kept in mind that marriage in the ANE was not completed in a single ceremony; rather, it was a process.³⁹ All marriages included two basic steps. First came the betrothal, the outcome of negotiations between the father of the bride and the bridegroom’s family.⁴⁰ The second step was the completion of the marriage,

generally agreed as the time when the bridegroom brought his bride into his house and they consummated the marriage. The period between the betrothal and the consummation of the marriage could vary. A girl might be betrothed at a young age, and married at a more appropriate age for reproduction.

Throughout the text Dinah is referred to as a *na'arah*, 'young girl' (Gen 34:3, 12) and *yaldah*, 'female child' (Gen 34:4), but never with the term *betulah*, 'teenage girl of marriageable age.' But one knows from context that she was sexually mature; Shechem sleeps with her and then asks to marry her (Gen 34:2, 8–12), and her brothers discuss her as one old enough to wed (Gen 34:13–17). Examining the sociohistorical background, as well as the literary uses, Parker determined that *yaldah* 'often refers to babies and children who are pre-pubescent...' ⁴¹ The term *na'arah*, on the other hand, encompasses a much wider social age range, denoting instead a status of dependent. ⁴² Looking further afield for some clarification, one finds that Neo-Babylonian contracts of marriage and dowry agreements use both *nur'atu* and *batultu*. The cognate relationship between *betulah* and *batultu* has long been established. Roth, however, draws attention to the use of *nur'atu* in these marriage documents as a cognate for the West Semitic *na'arah*. ⁴³ Significant for this essay is Roth's comment: '**Nu'artu* and *batultu* in the NB marriage agreements are terms used to categorize the status of a girl who is about to become a wife; she ... is in a transitional, preparatory stage.' ⁴⁴ In a narrative about marriage, the narrator uses the term *na'arah* to describe Dinah: she is a girl who is ready to become a wife. Perhaps the commentary here is that Jacob has not seen his daughter for what she is, a teenager of marriageable age. Instead of contracting for her marriage, he has ignored his paternal responsibilities. Jacob has stunted his daughter's process of girling by not facilitating her transition to the next stage in life. Dinah was not allowed to become an Israelite woman, a wife and a mother. The result of Jacob's inaction is an independent teenage daughter. Dinah's narrative is remembered as a rape, as decrying intermarriage. ⁴⁵ These issues are so important that they have drawn scholars' attention away from the underlying social issue: fathers should arrange for their daughter's marriage in a timely fashion. Doing so allowed fathers to maintain control over their teenage daughters. Jacob did not, and his daughter, stuck in a liminal space of being not a girl, but not yet a woman, took matters into her own hands and *went out to visit the daughters of the land*, and ended up becoming betrothed to a non-Israelite.

Let not his name be lost to his clan because he has no son! Give us a holding among our father's kinsmen!

(Num 27:4)

Zelophehad had no sons, only daughters. Biblical law was agnatic in principle, with inheritance passing to the closest male kinsman; daughters had no place in the inheritance process. ⁴⁶ The agnatic system in biblical Israel was reinforced by two beliefs: 1) men provided the seed for reproduction; and 2) Israel was

YHWH's firstborn.⁴⁷ These two principles reinforced each other, creating a patriarchal world focused on kinship lines and the survival of the clan. This was a problem for Zelophehad's daughters because although Zelophehad was dead, he was due to receive inalienable property in the Promised Land (*ahuzah*). In addition to the land, Zelophehad would have inalienable property transmitted through inheritance (*nahalah*) that needed to be claimed.⁴⁸ The five daughters of Zelophehad thus bring a petition to Moses, Eleazar, the chieftains, and the whole assembly of Israel at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting (Num 27:2) asking for the right to have a holding among their father's kinsmen (Num 27:4). God finds the petition to be just, and so five girls alter the legal institution of inheritance (Num 27:7). The agency with which these girls act is staggering. They represent children as a mechanism for social change, something that goes against a Western conception of childhood, and, as will be seen, against a biblical conception of a properly socialised girl.⁴⁹

Moses's declaration that daughters could inherit was neither earth shattering nor precedent setting in the larger ANE context. Indeed, throughout the ANE one finds many cases of daughters inheriting. Sumerian and Hittite laws, as well as documents from Nuzi, Ugarit, and Egypt all attest to this practice.⁵⁰ Zafira Ben-Barak notes however, that when daughters throughout the ANE inherited, it was usually on an *ad hoc* basis.⁵¹ In such cases, a father had no sons, and so to counter this most troubling issue, he would decide to allow a daughter(s) to inherit. Milgrom observes that the surrounding regions were all centralised urban societies, as opposed to the agrarian, clan-based society of ancient Israel. This different social structure, where the clan was no longer inextricably tied to the land, made it more acceptable to pass on inheritance to daughters.⁵²

Despite the practices in other regions, the tale of Zelophehad's daughters highlights that this was a change in practice for biblical Israel. Here begins the discomfort with these girls. Who are these children that successfully lobby for social change? The oldest among them must be a teenager of marriageable age, since in Numbers 27 she is able to act on her own and bring a legal case to court.⁵³ These girls must have been old enough to take care of themselves and bring a suit to a legal forum without adult supervision.⁵⁴ Indeed, the sequel to the narrative in Numbers 36 clarifies that these five girls are unmarried. It also highlights that the fact that these girls are of marriageable age is of utmost concern. Here are daughters at a liminal phase in their lives; they are at the cusp of completing their girling and becoming women. These girls fall into an additional liminal state: the 'fatherless, motherless woman, then found herself in a liminal position analogous to that of the widow and divorcee.'⁵⁵ These teenage girls, without male legal representation, took matters into their own hands (Num 27:1–8). Like Dinah, the girls are not properly shepherded by a male into the next stage in their lives: marriage. Unlike Dinah, these girls have no mother and, apparently, no one to keep them in check. There is discomfort with their actions and the fact that they have been found just in their complaint (Num 27:7). Frymer Kensky notes that within the HB, women are

neither required to marry a specific person nor within a particular kin group.⁵⁶ The tribal elders complain that this is an issue for, when the girls are married, their property could easily pass to another tribe, thus depleting Zelophehad's tribe of their inalienable property (Num 36:3). The elders are found just, and the daughters are limited to finding a mate within their own tribe.

Where other readings focus on the 'correction' to the new inheritance model, a childist reading turns towards the sociohistorical background and the way these teenage girls affected a change within the legal system. The prevailing attitude of discomfort with the unchecked actions of teenage girls in Numbers 27 could not be left to stand on its own. Without the 'fix' offered by Numbers 36, girls in this liminal phase of life, girls who were about to become Israelite women, would become an example. In this way, Numbers 36 echoes the fear spoken of in Esther 1:16–20, where Vashti's actions must be counteracted so that the ladies of Persia and Media will treat their husbands with respect, and not cite the actions of (ex)-Queen Vashti as precedent.⁵⁷ Proper socialisation dictates that teenage Israelite girls must learn to keep their place in society, to respect their elders, and to marry whom they are told.

So it became an annual custom in Israel: the daughters of Israel would go out to (mourn) lament and chant dirges for the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite, four days each year.

(Jud 11:39b–40)

The story surrounding Jephthah's daughter is unsettling. Her father makes a strange vow, saying that he would sacrifice 'whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me' (Jud 11:30). Based on the fact the traditional Israelite four-room house accommodated livestock, there is some ambiguity whether Jephthah knew what he was vowing.⁵⁸ Yet, when his daughter walks out of the house to greet him, he is doomed to sacrifice her (Jud 11:34). While Abraham was stopped from sacrificing Isaac, no such halt is put to Jephthah's actions.⁵⁹ Jephthah commits a crime that cuts short his only child's life.⁶⁰

Before her death she is described with an abstract feminine noun derived from *betulah* (Jud 11:37–38). This is the first narrative to use the technical term for the social age of a pubescent girl. Mieke Bal has suggested the term was used to highlight her status as a marriageable object.⁶¹ The Old Latin makes this status even clearer, rendering *betuleha* 'virginalia,' or 'things appropriate to a girl of marriageable age.'⁶² Once again there is discomfort with a teenage girl of marriageable age. Peggy Day argues that the story of Jephthah's daughter was later attached to the annual pilgrimage rite in Judges 11:39–40 as a foundation legend.⁶³ She reasons that Jephthah's daughter's status as a *betulah* is 'the focus of attention when she and her companions go off to the hills,' and therefore one should expect the ritual observance to be about a young teenage girl's status, and not her virginity.⁶⁴ Looking to comparative ancient rituals, she identifies the actions of Jephthah's daughter and the ensuing commemorative rite in verse 40 as a female puberty rite of passage

marking the transition between childhood and adulthood.⁶⁵ The lament in verse 40 recognises the death of childhood and the entrance into a new stage of life where one is ready for marriage.

Regardless of which came first, the rite or the narrative, the text describes a girl in a transitional phase between girlhood and womanhood. Unlike Rebekah and Dinah, who came from wealthy families, or Zelophehad's daughters, who were soon to gain property in the Promised Land, Jephthah's daughter was from a poor, lower-class, military family.⁶⁶ Her father came from a non-traditional household—his mother was a prostitute and his brothers disinherited him upon his father's death. Her mother is never mentioned.⁶⁷ Jephthah's daughter's family is not solid, but this does not dismiss her father's social responsibility of girling her. Fathers should be making betrothal arrangements, not arrangements for their sacrifice. Jephthah does not get the memo. His teenage daughter was left at home, unattended, while he was off at war. In the ANE, war was where men came of age, and being able to participate in battle and kill were markers of manliness.⁶⁸ Jephthah perhaps dipped too far into the manly sphere, concentrating on issues related to the preservation of the fledgling Israelite nation and not his family. Rather than making provisions to keep his daughter safe while he was away, he ironically contracted for her harm. The text warns that men also needed to protect their families, and not only their nation.

Judges 11:36–40 further warns that fathers need to control their teenage daughters. In these verses, Jephthah's daughter does two curious things. First, she speaks out, reassuring, indeed encouraging her father to keep his vow (Jud 11:36). Second, she asks permission to go to the hills to bewail her 'virginity,' i.e., her stunted gendering (Jud 11:37). Unlike Rebekah, who marries and has children, Dinah, who marries but has no children, or Zelophehad's daughters, who will marry in the future, Jephthah's daughter becomes the model of a daughter who will *never* marry. In a way, Jephthah's daughter becomes a martyr, calling attention to what a female life cycle should look like. She is doomed to this fate because her father pays no attention to her girling; on the contrary, he permanently stunts it. As a consequence, Jephthah suffers the ultimate fate; lacking a son, his daughter will not go on to marry and reproduce generations of Israelites that will inherit from him and carry on his name.⁶⁹

'Zooming out': a childist analysis

Each of these narratives presents discomfort with teenage girls. The biblical narratives show girls of a marriageable age who are not properly gendered. Their stories are complicated. On the one hand, they have agency. They are girls and teenagers who go against societal expectation and speak up or act out. In this way, these girls might be seen in a positive light. On the other hand, their stories are tales of warning. Their independence is folly. From a sociohistorical perspective, it demonstrates the authors' negative view of

girls who stray outside the bounds of the patriarchal order. Rather than celebrating these girls, the biblical authors use their stories to show what happens when the girling process goes awry. The texts become about something else—intermarriage, (im)proper worship, inheritance, leadership—anything, save the celebration of unfettered individualism.

This reading asks why. Why does the text focus on the teenage girl of marriageable age rather than children of a different age or gender?

Rebekah's story plants the seeds of discomfort with teenage girls. In her case, the authors crafted a story that was able to keep a happy ending. She followed the steps needed to become a successful female member of Israelite society. She grew up, married, and had children. Yet imbedded within her story lies a hidden attitude that manifests itself in the narratives of Dinah, Zelophahad's daughters, and Jephthah's daughter: teenage girls must be carefully watched. They have the potential to invoke change, and this is unacceptable in a patriarchal society where males, not females, are the ones who orchestrate how society operates and what Israelite culture should look like.

Properly enculturating children has direct implications for the survival of a culture. For an Israelite parent, enacting the edict of Deuteronomy 6:5–9 is crucial. The way parents do this is through teaching values and beliefs, by socialising children. Butler argued that socialisation and enculturation are enacted by parents and replicated by children. Drawing on Butler's work, Joyce finds 'the social production of embodied existence as resulting from repeated performance of particular ways of being that are represented within a society as *citational precedents*.'⁷⁰ But, as noted above, children are active social agents.⁷¹ With this in mind, there remains the possibility that while adults are modeling society and culture for the children, children do not do as they see. Children have agency.

This reality does not seem lost on the biblical authors. Life cycle events are a major time in which a society can instill gender, identity, and culture. Marriage is one such life cycle event addressed in depth.⁷² Teenage girls, specifically of marriageable age, rather than younger girls or women, are at a transitional place in life.⁷³ In the ANE, liminality was a dangerous space as it represented a threshold between the known and unknown.⁷⁴ This daughter who is sexually mature but living in the father's household is dangerous. Economically speaking, there is the possibility that she might be defiled before marriage and financially devalued, so to speak. A premarital romp in the hay also had legal implications; she was wrenching away the control her father had over her body and making legal decisions for herself.⁷⁵ From a psychological perspective, 'the daughter's presence within the father's house retains a figuratively, if not literally, incestuous option that threatens the family structure.'⁷⁶ The teenage daughter is the one who has the potential to undermine her parents' authority. Whether she holds the line and grows into a properly socialised Israelite is something only time will tell. Since Israelite society flourished for many years, we can assume that most parents succeeded in 'girling' their young daughters, instilling in them

Israelite culture and the responsibility to get married and reproduce that culture. Yet, the ramifications for what could happen should this process go awry were of such magnitude that the biblical text needed to include tales of warning. To return to Joyce's quote, the repeated performances in these tales act as 'citational precedents' of a different sort; they are precedents for what not to do.

Where the biblical text portrays an attitude of fear and sees teenage girls as a threat, a childist interpretation sees these girls in a positive light. Israelite society relied upon females for more than just reproduction.⁷⁷ With most households being agrarian, the division of labor demanded that women run the domestic front while men were in the fields. Even in those families who lived in cities, running a household was no small task. Children, especially girls, omnipresent in most aspects of daily life, would see problems older women faced and how they handled them.⁷⁸ Girls who thought outside the box may have been frowned upon by adult males, but might have had a positive effect on the household. Consider Rachel. According to ANE conventions, she was the disadvantaged one, the younger sister who was barren. This young woman waited for Jacob, kept the romance alive between them, and, in doing so, figured out a way to control the household. She, like Sarah, is a model of a proper Israelite woman. Accordingly, in ancient Israel, once a woman was married, she could act on behalf of her household, and even, when it came to domestic affairs, order men around. Note that both Sarah and Rachel control whom their husbands sleep with (Gen 16:1–4; 30:15–17) and are not criticised for it! The fact that the biblical text spends so much energy warning of the possible things that could go wrong if a teenage girl is left to act on her own demonstrates a deep discomfort with the latent power a teenage girl possessed. Yet, this attitude need not be understood as a negative, but as a positive. Young girls held within their power the key to Israelite society. They were the vessels through which Israelite culture and society were reproduced. If fathers fulfilled their duty to marry off their daughters, then Israelite society would indeed fulfill the divine dictum to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28).

Notes

- 1 For marriage arrangements, payments of dowry and bride price, and social expectations, see *inter alia*: Gen 28:6–9, 29: 15–30, 34:1–34, Exod 22:16–17; Deut 22:13–29, Judg 14, 1 Sam 18:22–25.
- 2 On the different kinds of Mesopotamian texts available and their usefulness in describing a child's life, see Shawn Flynn, *Children in Ancient Israel: The Hebrew Bible and Mesopotamia in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 9–16, 20.
- 3 In a patriarchal world, a female needed a male as her legal guardian. If the father was no longer in the picture, marriage documents demonstrate that her closest living male relative could also fulfill this role (Raymond Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law* [Afo 23; Horn, Austria: F. Burger, 1988]).

- 4 Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth; Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983).
- 5 The Ugaritic myths of Anat, Pughat, and Thitmanit, who are all young women of marriageable age, describe these women in terms of great power (Julie Parker, 'Women, Warriors, and Devoted Daughters: The Powerful Young Woman in Ugaritic Narrative Poetry,' *UF* 38 [2006]: 557–575). Both the HB and the Ugaritic texts acknowledge the potential power of their young women to evoke societal change. Whereas the Ugaritic texts champion the actions of their young women, the biblical texts treat this potential power as something that needs to be controlled.
- 6 This approach can also be called child-centered biblical interpretation.
- 7 Social maturation here is understood as marriage.
- 8 The terms childist and child-centered interpretation are used here interchangeably. As I use it, childist interpretation implies that children are the center (child-centered) of the interpretative lens.
- 9 Laurel Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children or I Shall Die: Children and Communal Survival in Biblical Literature* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 9.
- 10 Julie Wileman, *Hide and Seek: The Archaeology of Childhood* (Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2005), 9.
- 11 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990); J. J. Arnett, 'Broad and Narrow Socialization: Family in the Context of a Cultural Theory,' *Journal of Marriage and Family* 57.3 (1995): 617–628.
- 12 Naomi Steinberg, *Marriage and Kinship in Genesis: A Household Economics Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 17–19; Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 55. Compare the socialisation understood in the Ugaritic myths where Pughat and Thitmanit were properly taught 'and thus fulfill their roles in society' (Parker, 'Women, Warriors and Devoted Daughters,' 566). Regarding Pughat's story in particular, Parker states 'Social roles and duties figure prominently in this text' highlighting the use of mythic narratives, like those of the HB, to display how young women should act and not act (*ibid.*, 566).
- 13 Richard Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 274–277. The ode presents a woman of higher class, but the character traits she exhibits do not belong to the upper class alone. This passage describes a wife in the same terms as Woman Wisdom, and in doing so places a premium on the character of a woman in all areas of life: moral/ethical, religious, political, and domestic (Claudia Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* [Sheffield: Almond Press/JSOT Press, 1985], 179–191).
- 14 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 12–16, 101–119.
- 15 Dina Ben Ezra and Dorit Roer-Strier, 'Socialization of Children under Fire: Western Women and Palestinian Men,' *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 40.1 (2009): 1.
- 16 E.E. Maccoby, 'The Role of Parents in the Socialization of Children: An Historical Overview,' *Developmental Psychology* 28.6 (1992): 1006–1017; *idem*, 'Parenting and Its Effects on Children: On Reading and Misreading Behavior Genetics,' *Annual Review of Psychology* 51 (2000): 1–27; Jane Eva Baxter, *The Archaeology of Childhood: Children, Gender and Material Culture* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), 32.
- 17 Baxter, *The Archaeology of Childhood*, 29.
- 18 Socialisation and enculturation began in the female sphere, the domicile (A. Yasur-Landau, J. Ebeling, and L. Mazow, *Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel and Beyond* [Leiden: Brill, 2011]).

- 19 Bird, *Missing Persons*, 30; Athalya Brenner, *I Am ... Biblical Women Tell Their Own Stories* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005); Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- 20 Bird, *Missing Persons*, 57–60, 62–63; Carol Meyers, 'From Household to House of Yahweh: Women's Religious Culture in Ancient Israel,' *Congress Volume Basel 2001* (ed. A. Lemaire, VTS 92; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2002), 277–303; *idem*, 'Having Their Space and Eating There Too: Bread Production and Female Power in Ancient Israelite Households,' *Nashim* 5 (2002): 14–44.
- 21 Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960).
- 22 Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (trans. R. Baldick; New York: Vintage, 1962); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).
- 23 Kristine Garroway, *Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 31–32.
- 24 For more on target audience, authors and editors, and ideological concerns, see Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 18–25.
- 25 On the relationship between inheritance and marriage, see Steinberg, *Marriage and Kinship*.
- 26 Note the difference between proper gendering and incomplete gendering. A child might not complete gendering, or fail at a ritual aspect of gendering. This does not mean the child is improperly gendered, only that the gendering process is not complete (Stephen Wilson, *Making Men: The Male Coming-of-Age Theme in the Hebrew Bible* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015], 130–131). Cross-culturally, one finds the story of Anat. An unmarried, childless, Ugaritic goddess who is beyond the control of her father, Anat acts contra to that of a properly girled daughter. For a full description of Anat, see Parker, 'Women, Warriors and Devoted Daughters,' 557–562.
- 27 Tikvah Frymer Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 13–14. Aitken notes the similarities between Rebekah's narrative and that of the Ugaritic tradition of Keret, and surmises Rebekah's narrative was told during the marriage when the bride was transferred to the groom's house. Rebekah was meant to serve as a paradigm of the 'bride who went willingly' (Kenneth Atiken, 'The Wooing of Rebekah: A Study in the Development of the Tradition,' *JSOT* 30 [1984]: 3–23).
- 28 Scholars agree that a normal ANE marriage contract was an oral one in which 'the marriage agreement was between the father of the bride and the father of the groom and the residence is patrilocal' (Jonathan Paradise, 'Marriage Contracts of Free Persons at Nuzi,' *JCS* 39.1 [1987]: 6; see also Martin Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East* [trans. H. Richardson and M. Richardson; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012], 67–68). As noted, Inanna's consent to her marriage was a bit unusual and might be due to her social position as a goddess.
- 29 Speiser particularly liked this parallel because it also solved the problem of: 1) the brother offering Rebekah's hand in marriage; 2) the brother and mother receiving gifts; 3) Isaac calling Rebekah his sister in Genesis 26 (E.A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* [AB 1; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964], 184–185).
- 30 Samuel Greengus, 'Sisterhood Adoption and the "Wife-Sister" in Genesis,' *HUCA* 46 (1975): 5–31.

- 31 The 'house of the father' or *bet 'ab* was the overarching legal entity in which each person had a place. 'An individual's legal status, then, far from deriving from an abstract universal notion of personhood, was rather a function of one's concrete particular position or role within the house' (Robert Kawashima, 'Could a Woman Say "No" in Biblical Israel? On the Genealogy of Legal Status in Biblical Law and Literature,' *AJS Review* 35.1 [2001]: 6).
- 32 Scholars note that most written marriage contracts from across the ANE describe special circumstances (Samuel Greengus, 'The Old Babylonian Marriage Contract,' *JAOS* 89 [1969]: 505–532; Bazel Porten, *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Colony* [Berkeley: University of California, 1968]; Paradise, 'Marriage,' 1–36). Alternatively, in comparing Rebekah's story to Inanna's, one might conclude that a girl was not completely left out of decisions made concerning her future.
- 33 On the financial side of marriage in the ANE, see Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 112–146; Greengus, 'The Old Babylonian Marriage Contract,' 514–524.
- 34 Baxter, *Archaeology of Childhood*, 32.
- 35 Attaching a patronymic to a person's name would be a means of tying them to the patrilineal *bet 'ab*. On various names and the meaning of names, see the studies by Albertz and Golub and the sources within (R. Albertz, 'Personal Names and Family Religion,' in *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* [ed. R. Albertz and R. Schmitt; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012], 245–386 and Appendices B1–B6; Mitka Golub, 'The Distribution of Personal Names in the Land of Israel and Transjordan during the Iron II Period,' *JAOS* 134.4 [2014]: 621–642).
- 36 Sarna, *JPS: Genesis*, 233. Other interpretations of Genesis 34 try to determine whether: 1) she was raped; 2) the brothers were heroes; 3) the punishment (the extermination of the Shechemite males) fit the crime. For an overview of these arguments, see Alice Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 73–77.
- 37 Rashi's comments on Genesis 32:23, following Genesis Rabbah 75:9 where Jacob is criticised for withholding Dinah from a marriage to Esau, an Israelite. She was of such good moral standing that she would turn Esau back to the right path.
- 38 Martha Roth, 'Age at Marriage and the Household: A Study of Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian Forms,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29.4 (1987): 715–747.
- 39 Samuel Greengus, 'Redefining "Inchoate Marriage" in Old Babylonian Contexts,' in *Riches Hidden in Secret Places* (ed. T. Abusch; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 123–139. For further discussion of inchoate marriages, see C. Wilcke, 'Familiengründung im Alten Babylonien,' in *Geschlechtsreife und Legitimation zur Zeugung* (ed. E. Müller; München: Karl Alber Freiburg, 1985), 285–292.
- 40 Marriages could be much more complicated, with additional steps surrounding the betrothal and nuptial stages (Garroway, *Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household*, 115–116 and sources therein).
- 41 Julie Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable: Children in the Hebrew Bible, Especially the Elisha Cycle* (Brown Judaic Studies 355; Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 2013), 65. Rofé understands *yaldah* as a later insertion, noting that in Late Biblical Hebrew *yaldah* can mean young adult (Alexander Rofé, 'Defilement of Virgins in Biblical Law and the Case of Dinah (Gen 34),' *Biblica* 86.3 [2005]: 373).
- 42 For a review of scholarship on the *na'arah*, see Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 60–64.

- 43 Roth, 'Age at Marriage,' 742.
- 44 Roth, 'Age at marriage,' 746.
- 45 Rofé has argued for two textual layers, one of which saw Dinah's defilement as an offense against the clan (pre-exilic) and a subsequent layer that decried intermarriage. The second layer should be understood as post-exilic and related to the fear of intermarriage (Rofé, 'Defilement,' 371–374). In seeing multiple layers in the text, Rofé's argument supports the idea that the text was originally about something different than intermarriage.
- 46 Jacob Milgrom, *JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 482; Calum Carmichael, 'Inheritance in Biblical Sources,' *Law and Literature* 20.2 (2008): 233–234. Noting that there are no biblical laws stating sons inherit, Heirs states there were written and unwritten laws. The latter are known from the customs and practices recorded in the narratives, and these latter texts demonstrate that sons inherited (Richard Heirs, 'Transfer of Property by Inheritance and Bequest in Biblical Law and Tradition,' *Journal of Law and Religion* 10.1 [1993–1994]: 123).
- 47 Carmichael, 'Inheritance,' 233–236.
- 48 For the definitions of *ahuzah* and *nahalal*, see Milgrom, *Numbers*, 232.
- 49 On Western conceptions of childhood, see Baxter, *Archaeology of Children*, 18.
- 50 Zafrira Ben-Barak, *Inheritance by Daughters in Israel and the Ancient Near East: A Social, Legal, and Ideological Revolution* (Jaffa: Archaeological Center, 2006), 109–209.
- 51 Ben-Barak, *Inheritance by Daughters*, 196–197.
- 52 Milgrom, *Numbers*, 482. Contra to Milgrom's point is the belief that contracts or documents of inheritance, like those of marriage, were only written when there needed to be an exception to the rule. One might argue that the wealthy fathers who could afford the scribal fee for drawing up a document allocating an inheritance for their daughters were urban dwellers who had accrued a large amount of wealth, rather than simple farmers and shepherds.
- 53 On the entrance of the Tent of Meeting serving as a parallel to the judicial area of the city gate, see Milgrom, *Numbers*, 230–231; Gen 34:20; Deut 21:19; Jer 26:10; Ruth 4:1.
- 54 Biologically, they would be categorised as juveniles or adolescents, not children. A juvenile has reached the point where she is no longer dependent upon the mother and has the physical ability and cognitive development to fend for herself. Girls reach the juvenile stage between ages seven and ten years of age and then go through puberty and into adolescence, which can last five to ten years. Around age eighteen, a girl has fully developed—biologically—into a woman (Kristine Garroway, *Growing Up in Ancient Israel: Children in Material Culture and Biblical Texts* [Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, forthcoming 2019], introduction); Barry Bogin and Holly Smith, 'Evolution of the Human Life Cycle,' in *Human Biology: An Evolutionary and Biocultural Perspective* [ed. S. Stinson, B. Bogin, and D. O'Rourke; Hoboken, NY: Wiley, 2012], 537–548).
- 55 Kawashima, 'Could a Woman Say "No",' 12.
- 56 Frymer Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 72.
- 57 Note that here too in Esther, a familial dispute leads to a national crisis.
- 58 Robert Boling, *Judges* (AB 6a; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 208; Tammi Schneider, *Judges* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 175; Lawrence Stager, 'The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel,' *BASOR* 260

- (1985): 1–35, here 12. See also this volume, Heath D. Dewrell, ‘Vows and Children in the Hebrew Bible.’
- 59 Schneider, *Judges*, 176–177.
- 60 The fact that Jephthah’s tenure as judge over Israel does not usher in the traditional forty years of peace can be seen as a negative comment on the child sacrifice resulting from his vow (Schneider, *Judges*, 183; Boling, *Judges*, 209).
- 61 Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 51.
- 62 Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 130.
- 63 Peggy Day, ‘From the Child a Woman Is Born: The Story of Jephthah’s Daughter,’ in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. P. Day; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 58–74. For an argument against the text as an etiology, see Boling, *Judges*, 210.
- 64 Day, ‘From the Child,’ 60.
- 65 Day, ‘From the Child,’ 64–66. Whereas Day cites the Greek rites of passage and the legends of Iphegenia, Soggin points out the similarities with the Ugaritic texts and the Baal cycle (J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary*, translated by John S. Bowden, OTL (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox, 1981), 218).
- 66 Schneider, *Judges*, 161–165, 177–178.
- 67 Judges 11:1–11.
- 68 Wilson, *Making Men*, 130–135.
- 69 Steinberg notes that it is not enough to be a woman, or a wife, or a mother. One must become the mother of the child through whom the line of inheritance will pass (Steinberg, *Marriage and Kinship*, 78).
- 70 Emphasis my own. Rosemary Joyce, ‘Girling the Girl and Boying the Boy: The Production of Adulthood in Ancient Mesoamerica,’ *World Archaeology* 31.3 (2000): 474.
- 71 Baxter, *Archaeology of Childhood*, 32.
- 72 Consider the ‘virgin’ laws in Deuteronomy 22:20–29.
- 73 Garroway, *Children*, 196. Such a girl is often referred to as a *betulah*. The term itself denotes a liminal phase as it can refer to a girl who is of marriageable age, who has reached puberty but has not birthed a child. As nearing or having completed physical maturation, she is desirable (Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable*, 58–60 and sources within).
- 74 On the need to protect thresholds, see Erle Leichty, ‘Demons and Population Control,’ *Expedition* 13 (1971): 22–26.
- 75 Joseph Fleishman, ‘The Delinquent Daughter and Legal Innovation in Dt xxii 20–21,’ *VT* 58 (2008): 191–210.
- 76 Ilona Rashkow, ‘Daughters and Fathers in Genesis ... Or What is Wrong with This Picture?’ in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy (Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second) series)* (ed. A. Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2000), 28.
- 77 Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*.
- 78 On the omnipresence of children in the household and children as shapers of the household, see Kristin De Lucia, ‘A Child’s House: Social Memory, Identity, and the Construction of Childhood in Post-Classic Mexican Households,’ *American Anthropologist* (NS) 112.4 (2010): 607–624; Garroway, *Children*.

Part II

Children in Christian writings and the Greco-Roman world



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5 Girls and goddesses

The Gospel of Mark and the Eleusinian Mysteries

Sharon Betsworth

The Gospel of Mark contains several narratives in which children are characters and are the focus of the story: Jairus's daughter (5:21–43), Herodias's daughter (6:14–29), the Syrophoenician woman's daughter (7:24–30), the boy with the spirit (9:14–29), and two teachings containing children—the child Jesus sets in the midst of the disciples (9:33–37) and the children who are brought to Jesus for a blessing (10:13–16). The children in Mark's Gospel are incorporated into the narrative in the same manner as their adult counterparts, and the reign of God is on display through the Markan Jesus's interactions with them; just like adults, children are sick and are healed by Jesus; children have demons or unclean spirits and are exorcized by Jesus. Children crowd around Jesus, and he speaks to them. The only way in which children differ from adults in the Gospel of Mark narratively is that children are the only character group whom Jesus singles out for special blessing and upon whom Jesus bestows ownership of the reign of God (10:13–16). Overall, the Gospel of Mark puts forth a positive portrayal of children and Jesus's interactions with them. An exception to this rule is the child narrative in Mark 6:14–29.¹

In Mark 6:14–29, King Herod orders the execution of John the Baptist. He does so at the request of his wife Herodias's daughter, who has 'pleased' him while dancing at his birthday party. The girl, however, acts at the behest of her mother, Herod's wife. Mark's depiction of the family in this story is decidedly negative, and the child, whether or not the reader deems her to be culpable for her actions, is caught up in the dark, death-dealing actions of the adults. This is the only explicitly cynical story involving a child in Mark's Gospel. What could be the author's purpose in depicting this family, including this girl, in such a manner?

One of the reasons for the negative portrayal of the Herodian family, especially the mother Herodias and the unnamed girl, had to do with competing religious narratives and expressions in the Greco-Roman world. In that context, if one thought of a story with a daughter who gets caught between the desires and interests of a king-father and queen-mother, the myth of Demeter and Persephone (also known as Korē), would likely to come to mind. The myth was well known throughout the Greco-Roman world, and the Homeric

Hymn to Demeter is the best known version.² This poem and the related cult of Demeter and Korē—also known as the Eleusinian Mysteries—are striking intertexts to read alongside the story in Mark 6; both depict a mother-daughter relationship and contain a king as a key player in their interactions.³ However, unlike the mother and daughter goddesses, who initiates into the Mysteries believed conquered death and brought new life, the Herodian mother and daughter instead bring only death.

In this religious milieu, the author of the Gospel of Mark likely perceived the need to distinguish the practices and narratives of the early Jesus followers from those of the cult of Demeter and Korē. There are at least three portions of the Gospel which lend themselves to being read in this light: 1) the parables of the sower and the growing seed (Mark 4:1–20, 26–29); 2) the healing of the Gerasene demoniac (5:1–20); and 3) Herod's birthday party, in which his (step)daughter dances (Mark 6:14–29). In these episodes, Mark was likely drawing a contrast between the Jewish father God and his son Jesus and the mother goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone, as Mark argued that Jesus, the Son of God, is the one who dies and rises again from the dead.⁴ This essay will focus primarily upon the narrative in Mark 6:14–29, comparing it to the *Hymn to Demeter* and the initiation rites of the Eleusinian Mysteries. It will proceed as follows: first, I will situate the Gospel of Mark in its broader religious and literary context, drawing upon a study by Austin Bausch to explicate Mark's use of Greco-Roman texts in the Gospel. Second, I will briefly summary of the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* and provide an overview of the initiation rituals of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Third, I will compare the *Hymn* and initiation rituals of the Mysteries to the narrative of the dancing daughter in Mark 6. At the end of the essay, I will briefly discuss other the sections of the Gospel mentioned above to support this reading of Mark 6:14–29.

Mark's religious and literary context

The Gospel of Mark was written in a time and place of religious diversity—the latter part of the first century CE in the Roman Empire. In addition to Judaism, the early audiences who heard the Gospel likely participated in various religious traditions present in the Roman Empire. There were Roman household gods, such as the Lares and Penates; the Greek goddess of the hearth, Hestia; and people worshipped Pan and nymphs in the countryside. There were also the obligatory public and civic ceremonies honoring the Olympian gods and goddess or their Roman counterparts. Children were involved in many of these religious experiences. In the home, children's lives were surrounded by ritual, including rites of passage through which children progressed as they matured. They would actively participate with their families and communities in public and civic rituals. Children also had special roles in many of these observances: boy and girls sang in choirs, and both

boys and girls could be acolytes for priests during ceremonies. Children were also active participants in weddings and funerals.⁵

The mystery cults were another very popular form of religiosity throughout the Greco-Roman era, including in the early years of the Christian movement. Through the initiation rituals, persons were brought into a relationship with a particular deity who promised a better life after death. The cults were called ‘mysteries’ because portions of the initiation rituals were shrouded in secrecy. The initiates could not divulge the nature of the things they experienced to anyone. While several mystery religions flourished in the ancient world, one of the most important was the Eleusinian Mysteries honoring the goddesses Demeter and Korē. In this context, Mark had to make the case that Jesus was the Son of God not only to his Jewish audience but also to non-Jewish Greeks and Romans who participated in these various religious traditions, including the mystery religions.

While readers of the New Testament easily see allusions to and quotations from the Old Testament, they are less likely to be aware of inferences to and quotations from Greco-Roman literature and non-biblical traditions.⁶ For the authors of the New Testament, including Mark, the Jewish scripture were treated with great esteem and deemed authoritative. The writers, however, also drew upon the vast Greco-Roman literary corpus, ‘using it suggestively rather than authoritatively.’⁷ Austin Busch asserts that traces of Homeric literature present in the Gospel of Mark will appear faint in comparison to the allusions to the book of Daniel. However, discerning such allusions to Homeric (and other) literature ‘can generate significant interpretive insights.’⁸ He goes on to say,

If a plausible case can be made for even faint echoes of these writings in the New Testament narratives, and if it can be demonstrated that their recognition deepens our understanding of the texts in which they appear, we ought to acknowledge that we have belatedly hit upon a semiotic complex that largely ceased to be recognized as the New Testament came to be read in a more and more exclusively Judeo-Christian context.⁹

Following Busch’s lead, I will explore the ‘echoes’ of the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* and the Eleusinian Mysteries in Mark’s telling of the dancing daughter in 6:14–29. I will begin with a summary of the myth and an overview of the mystery cult.

The Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* and the Eleusinian Mysteries

The *Hymn to Demeter* is an etiology establishing the seasonal cycle including the cultivation of cereal; it also introduces death, enthrones a divine couple in the underworld, and reveals the origins of the Eleusinian Mysteries.¹⁰ The poem, which was written in the style of Homer’s epics, was likely written between 650 and 550 BCE.¹¹ While most Homeric hymns celebrating a Greek

deity are only a few lines, the *Hymn to Demeter* is 500 verses.¹² It narrates the familiar story of the abduction of Persephone by Zeus's brother, Hades. Persephone was the daughter of the goddess Demeter and the god Zeus, who had agreed—without Demeter's permission—to allow Hades to marry the girl. While Persephone is away from her mother, playing with her girlfriends, Hades abruptly seizes her, carrying her off to the underworld to be his bride. Mother Demeter roams the earth searching for and grieving the loss of her daughter. Demeter was worshipped as the goddess responsible for the growth of grain. In her grief and anger over the loss of her daughter, Demeter allows no grain to grow on the earth during the following year. Zeus sees the plight that this causes for humankind and tells Hades to let Persephone return to her mother. Hades agrees, but as the girl departs, he slips a pomegranate seed into her mouth. Because she has eaten Hades' food, she will be required to return to the underworld. Zeus and Demeter agree that their daughter will spend one-third of the year in the underworld with her husband, and in the spring, she will rise again to spend two-thirds of the year on earth with her mother.

The story recounted in the *Hymn* is the foundational myth for the Eleusinian Mysteries. The Mysteries were open to any person who spoke Greek and had not committed murder, including men and women, and slaves and free persons. Children were also permitted to become initiates, and certain children could do so without any charge. Orphans were given special priority as initiates as well.¹³ The rites flourished during both the Hellenistic period (323–146 BCE) and into the Roman times (146 BCE–400 CE).¹⁴ Celebrants came from all around the known world, and sanctuaries to Demeter and Persephone were widespread around the Mediterranean, including in Corinth, Athens, and cities in Asia Minor, which had established Jewish and Christian communities.

The two primary festivals of the Eleusinian cult were the 'Greater Mysteries,' which honored Demeter, and the 'Lesser Mysteries,' which honored Persephone. The Lesser Mysteries were held in the spring and prepared initiates for the Greater Mysteries. The Greater Mysteries were held once a year in the early fall and contained both public and private celebrations.¹⁵ The public outdoor rituals were open to initiates and non-initiates alike. During the public ceremonies, the initiates went through a variety of rites such as purification at the beginning and being crowned with a garland at the conclusion of the festivities. The private, mysterious portions occurred in between these two public rites. Initiation was on an individual basis, with group initiations forbidden by law.¹⁶

The festivities began with the Hierophant, the high priest, inviting those who had been initiated into the Lesser Mysteries to enter into the Greater Mysteries.¹⁷ The priest and priestess then led a procession from the cult's Eleusinian Temple to Athens, carrying the container holding the cult's sacred objects. There the people of Athens, led by their priest, met the procession and escorted the group to the sanctuary of the goddess in Athens. On the second day, initiates sacrificed a pig and a special priest called the 'hydranos,' or 'the baptist,' cleansed them of impurities in the Ilissus river.¹⁸ Initiates spent the

third day fasting and partaking of a ritual drink; fasting ended in the evening with sacred foods. On the fourth day, initiates gave offerings to the deities and performed circular dances.¹⁹ On the fifth day, the procession back to Eleusis began, which was a time of great celebration. During the procession, observers hurled insults and crude remarks at the initiates, who were important citizens. The initiates did not respond but humbled themselves before the jeerers.²⁰ On the sixth day, the great procession called 'Iacchus' took place, which included rituals honoring the *theopaida* (son/child of god) Iacchus, who plays a significant role in the *Hymn to Demeter*. The procession would stop for participants to 'make sacrifices, give offerings, sing hymns and dance in front of temples associated with Demeter.'²¹

The seventh and eighth days contained the *mysteria*, which consisted of three parts: *dromena* ('things done'), *deiknumena* ('things shown'), and *legomena* ('things spoken').²² While these portions were the most secretive and thus are not entirely known even today, it is likely that a part of the ritual included a sacred pageant presenting the story of Demeter and Persephone. The dramatizing of the myth created a sense of connection between the initiates and the goddesses. This bond brought them comfort as they grew to understand more fully the nature of the underworld and life beyond death. The priest then explained the mysteries to the initiates. The final rite was viewing the sacred objects of the cult, during which time the initiates experienced a mystic communion or communication with the goddesses.

It remains unknown exactly what the sacred objects were, what the initiates saw, and what the priests told them and how that was efficacious for the initiates. These *were* the mysteries of Demeter and Korē; these were the secret rituals that connected the initiates to the divinities of the underworld, who controlled the world of the dead. The relationship with Demeter and Korē provided confidence for the initiates in the face of death, both for the individual and for the community.²³ Cicero wrote of the Mysteries:

For among the many excellent and indeed divine institutions which your Athens has brought forth and contributed to human life, none, in my opinion, is better than those mysteries. For by their means we have been brought out of our barbarous and savage mode of life and educated and refined to a state of civilization; and as the rites are called 'initiations,' so in very truth we have learned from them the beginnings of life and have gained the power not only to live happily, but also to die with a better hope.²⁴

After the rites of initiation, there was no ongoing obligation to the goddesses. Initiates were not required to return to the sanctuary to worship the goddesses or to follow any particular patterns or rules in living. They did not belong to any group as a result of their initiation, which in some way served the goddess or humanity. Rather, those initiated into the Mysteries of Demeter and Korē simply returned to their normal life, enriched by their Eleusinian experience.²⁵

The cult began to wane with the establishment of Christianity in Greece. The great Temple of Demeter was destroyed around 170 CE. Although some of the activities of the cult were rekindled during the reign of Julian the Apostate (361–363 CE), in 389 CE the Byzantine Emperor Theodosius issued an edict prohibiting men and women from worshipping any deities except the Christian father and son.²⁶ Christians destroyed the remaining sanctuary by the end of the fifth century CE. A church was built in the vicinity and the sacred areas were used as cemeteries, effectively destroying the cult.²⁷ The content of the Mysteries had been transmitted orally from Hierophant to Hierophant over generations, and with the death of the last Hierophant, so too did the Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone die.

Given the prominence of the Mysteries in the ancient world, the cult was surely known to the New Testament writers and certainly in the early church.²⁸ Indeed, Nancy Evans remarks,

This Eleusinian system of rituals, dedications and sacrifices remained intact throughout the early centuries of the Common Era, and provided a common point of experience for the citizens of the Empire, many of whom went on to form nascent Christian communities.²⁹

Various scholars have discussed allusions to the Mysteries in the New Testament. Susan Elliott argues that the allegory of Hagar and the free woman in Galatians 4:21–5:1 refers to the cult of Cybele, who was a goddess in Asia Minor associated with Demeter.³⁰ Likewise, Larry Kreitzer asserts that obscure elements in the letter to the Ephesians, particularly references to ‘obscene, silly and vulgar talk’ and ‘shameful things’ done in secret (5:4, 12) are allusions to the initiatory rites of the Mysteries.³¹ Carl Kerenyi has also stated that New Testament references to grain being buried, dying, and rising (John 12:24; 1 Cor. 15:35–37) ‘make it easier for those raised in Christian or Jewish faith to gain access to the Eleusinian Mysteries.’³² I would suggest the opposite, that the New Testament writers used images such as that of the buried, dying, and rising again in reference to Jesus’s death and resurrection as an access point for those familiar with the Eleusinian Mysteries.

The Gospel of Mark and the Eleusinian Mysteries

The author of the Gospel of Mark was also apparently familiar with the myth and cult of Demeter and Korē. There are at least three passages in Mark’s Gospel that may allude either to the *Hymn to Demeter* or the Eleusinian Mysteries: the parables of the sower and the growing seed in chapter 4; the healing of the Gerasene demoniac in chapter 5; and the narrative of the Herodian family in chapter 6, which is where I will begin my discussion. In particular, I will juxtapose the daughters in each tradition. I have discussed the mother-daughter relationship in the *Hymn to Demeter*, as well as comparing Herodias’s daughter to Persephone, extensively in a previous study, though I will give some attention to the mothers below.³³

However, my focus here will be upon the two areas left I left unexplored: 1) the agency of the girls and 2) the significance of the dance and dancing in the respective traditions.

Mark 6:14–29 is an intercalation, a literary technique common in the Gospel of Mark in which the one story begins and is intersected by a second complete story before first story concludes. In 6:7–13, Jesus sends out his disciples to heal the sick and cast out demons; in 6:30, the disciples then return to report all they had done. In between these episodes, Herod hears about Jesus's and his disciples' activities and begins to ponder who Jesus is. He decides that Jesus is John the Baptist, who has risen from the dead. In a flashback, Herod recalls the events leading to the execution of John: Herod has had a birthday party for his important officials and a young female member of his family provided the entertainment. Joel Marcus notes that the contrast between Jesus sending out the disciples and Herod sending out his henchmen to kill John 'is part of a motif of demonic caricature that runs through the passage.'³⁴

The manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark are unclear regarding the relationship of the girl to Herod; some suggest that she is Herod's daughter, while others suggest that she is the daughter of Herodias, and thus Herod's step-daughter.³⁵ Mark does not name the girl, but Josephus indicates that Herodias had a daughter named Salome by her first husband, Philip, who was Herod Antipas's brother.³⁶ Moving forward, I will refer to the girl as Salome, likely her historic name, as I compare her story to that of Persephone.

Mark 6:14–29 is a part of the daughter cycle in Mark's Gospel, a set of four narratives about daughters: the woman from the crowd whom Jesus calls daughter and Jairus's daughter (5:21–43), Herodias and her daughter (6:14–29), and the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman (7:24–30). Each of these characters is described in Greek as either *thugatēr* (daughter) or *thugatrion* (little daughter). Three of the narratives are stories of faith and healing (5:21–24, 34–43; 5:25–33; 7:24–30) with Herodias and her daughter in between them (6:14–29). Of the four characters referred to as 'daughter,' three are girls: Jairus's daughter, whom Mark notes is 12 years old, Herodias's daughter, and the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter. Based upon the words Mark uses to describe the girls—*korasion* (girl or little girl, 5:41; 6:22, 28), *paidion* (child or little child, 5:39; 7:28, 30), *thugatēr* (5:35; 6:22; 7:26, 29); *thugatrion* (5:23; 7:25)—it is likely he was indicating that all three girls are about the same age, 12 years old. While two of the girls, as well as the boy in Mark 9:14–29, are brought by a caring parent to Jesus for healing, the Herodian girl is exploited by her (step)father and prompted by her mother to ask for the beheading of the prophet, John the Baptizer. The girl complies with her mother's request, and Herod's soldiers bring John's head into the banquet on a platter, just as the girl has asked.

The juxtaposition of Herod, Herodias, and their daughter with the faithful parents and children in the Gospel functions in part as a critique of the elite culture of the Roman Empire. Mark condemns the ruling class by portraying Herod as a man who throws himself lavish birthday parties, considered gauche by the standards of the days; and he makes rash vows based upon what he

perceived as a provocative dance by a young girl. Herodias is portrayed as a ruthless, elite woman, who desires revenge. Neither of them shows any concern for the dangerous situation in which they place the girl. According to the social conventions of the Roman world, elite, citizen daughters who were not married were protected in order to preserve their virginity. The girl should have been safely shielded from the men at the party in another part of the house. But Herod and Herodias have put her on display to dance. Women and girls who performed at such occasions were usually courtesans and were considered to be sexually available to the men present. Ville Vuolanto states that ‘the dutiful and affectionate relationship between a parent and child’ was one of the most accepted virtues in the ancient world.³⁷ The girl is presented as being an obedient child, dancing for Herod and then relaying Herodias’s request back to Herod. However, Herod and Herodias are depicted as defying social norms regarding daughters. They behave neither dutifully nor affectionately toward their daughter nor take measure to protect her virginity. They are not upheld as models for parents or children hearing the Gospel to emulate and are the anti-type of the other parents in the Gospel. Yet in addition to making a critique of the upper class, Mark uses this narrative to denounce the Eleusinian Mysteries through allusions to both the *Hymn to Demeter* and the activities of the cult focusing upon the speech and action of the girls in each tradition.

The agency of girls

Children in ancient texts have long gone unnoticed. Few scholars discuss children as characters central to stories and plots, and often commentators relegate them to mere metaphors for what an adult should or should not be. As this present volume indicates, however, interest in children in the ancient world and the biblical text is growing. One key element in interpreting the role of a child in a text is to examine his or her agency. Vuolanto offers this definition of child agency:

A child who has agency is an interactive child, with a sense of having influence, and of being able to make a difference. To be an agent is to be able to take the *initiative*, to be *creative* – but this creativeness does not need to be spectacular since it takes place in everyday life: agency is not present only when acting in contrast to social expectations, but also in the reproduction of social norms.³⁸

Salome and Persephone have agency in their respective literary texts. It is this agency that the author of the Gospel of Mark makes use of as he contrasts Salome and Persephone. I will first note a few literary allusions that Mark may have been drawing upon between his story and the *Hymn to Demeter* and then move to examine the actions and speech of the girls, which is where their initiative and creativity come to the fore.

The vocabulary used for the girls is the first point of connection between Salome and Persephone. In the *Hymn*, Persephone is first introduced as Demeter's daughter (*thugatēr*) and then she is called *korē* (girl).³⁹ Indeed, in Greek literature, Persephone is often simply called *Korē*. Likewise, Salome is also called *thugatēr* and *korasion*, the koine Greek form of the classical Greek word *korē*. *Korasion* is used in the New Testament only in this scene (6:22, 28) and in reference to Jairus's daughter (5:41, 42). As mentioned, other words Mark uses for girls include *thugatrion* (little daughter, 5:23; 7:25) and *paidion* (child, 5:39, 40, 41; 7:30). He could have also used *hē pais* (girl) or *parthenos* (unmarried girl) to refer to any of the girls. In the story of Salome, however, he only uses the terms which are also used in the *Hymn* for Persephone, *thugatēr* and *korasion*.

A more complex set of allusions is found in the girls' actions and speech. First, both girls are initially separated from their mothers. At the beginning of the *Hymn*, Persephone is apart from her mother, playing in a meadow with her girlfriend (*Hymn* 1–15).⁴⁰ Likewise, when Salome is dancing before Herod's friends at his birthday party, she is separated from her mother (Mk. 6:22). Herodias is 'off-stage' during the dance, and the girl must exit the room to ask her mother for a request (6:24). Second, both girls are engaged in what could be described as playful acts: Persephone is in a meadow with other girl goddesses picking flowers (*Hymn* 4–5), and Salome dances (6:22). The word Mark uses for 'dance' (*orcheomai*) in the other synoptics also refers to children at play (Mt. 11:17; Lk. 7:32).⁴¹ The difference between the two activities, however, puts a negative spin on Mark's story; in contrast to Persephone, who is playing with her girlfriends, gathering flowers, Salome is dancing before a crowd of men at a party. Persephone is with her peers; Salome is apparently alone with adult men.

Third, both scenes provide the catalyst for the action, which propels the plot of each story forward. While Persephone is playing, Hades, the god of the underworld, suddenly swoops up in his chariot and snatches her away. She screams as he carries her off to be his bride (*Hymn* 16–20). Before Hades permits her eventual return, he stealthily places a pomegranate seed in her mouth. The pomegranate seed was associated with blood, death, fertility, and marriage, thus infusing the story with these images as well (370–372). Similarly, Salome's dance sets off a series of events. Herod perceives the dance in an erotic manner, and the dance 'pleases' (*ēresko*) him (6:22b). There are several instances in the New Testament in which *ēresko* simply refers to making someone happy or doing something that seeks another's approval.⁴² However, in the context of this passage, it seems to have a sexual connotation.⁴³ In response, the king vows to give the girl whatever she desires, a vow which leads to the beheading of John the Baptist.

Fourth, when both girls are reunited with their mothers, they speak for the first time in their respective stories. Both girls are portrayed as being very attached to their mothers, and in their speech following the return to their mothers, they both put their own twist on the events, exhibiting initiative and

creativity. Persephone tells her mother in great detail what transpired while she was in the underworld (*Hymn* 385–433). When her mother presses her to say if Hades deceived her in any way, she says that he forced her—totally against her will—to eat the pomegranate seed, which is an exaggeration of the previously narrated stealthy action. Her direct speech is lengthy, twenty-seven verses. Likewise, Mark also endows Salome with direct speech. When she goes to ask her mother for a suggestion regarding what she should ask of the king, Herodias replies simply, ‘The head of John the baptizer.’ When the girl reports back to the king, like Persephone, she exaggerates the request, ‘I want you to give me *at once* the head of John the Baptist *on a platter*’ (Mk. 6:24–25). Without a doubt, Salome exhibits agency, which shows her initiative and creativity. In contrast to Vuolanto’s definition, her actions and speech *are* spectacular; among the female characters in Mark’s Gospel only the *paidiske* (young slave woman) who confront Peter has more direct speech (14:66–69). Indeed, Salome is more powerful in the story than the prophet of God, who does not speak or act:

While John had attempted to put distance between Herod and Herodias, the girl brings them together; by moving between her parents, she is able to unite her mother’s murderous intention (but inability to kill) with her father’s ability (but reluctance) to kill.⁴⁴

The girls’ speech is a central aspect of their agency in these stories. While Persephone’s speech to her mother may have been an exaggeration, the truth still remains. Since she ate the pomegranate, she will forever have to return to the underworld, where she will reign as queen of death. Similarly, the speech of Salome, who has the last word in that story, turns the party from a place of revelry into a place of death. Their speech and actions are crucial for reaching the climax of each story. However, their stories differ in perspective. Persephone’s return to her mother and description of all that occurred while she was away ultimately leads Demeter to restore the growth of grain on the earth and culminates in the establishment of the Eleusinian Mysteries. In contrast, Salome’s return to her mother and her subsequent request of Herod leads to the death of John the Baptist, which ultimately functions to foreshadow the death of Jesus, also at the hands of the elite.

The dance and dancing in Mark and the Mysteries

Another aspect of the story of Salome and its connection to the Eleusinian Mysteries is the girl’s dance itself. Salome’s dance is narrated very briefly by the author of the Gospel, ‘when the daughter of Herodias came in and danced.’ The dance is neither the subject nor the finite verb of the sentence; is it within a genitive absolute clause, standing apart from the main action of the sentence, ‘she pleased.’ Thus, while Mark says very little about the dance,

it is the fulcrum of the story; it is point at which Herod's party shifts from an elite, high-powered dinner party to a death sentence for a prophet of God. I will discuss briefly the role of dance in Second Temple Judaism and early Christian texts, then turn to focus in more detail upon dance in Greek culture and especially in the Eleusinian Mysteries.

Tal Ilan has examined the nature of dance in biblical and rabbinical writings. She argues that 'dance was a highly gendered activity'; men danced with men, and women danced with women. Indeed, different words in Hebrew indicate men dancing (*rqd*) versus women dancing (*hwl*). She states that it doubtful that 'mixed dancing ever occurred. Yet is equally suggestive that dancing had highly sexual overtones to it. It appears from all these traditions that women dance for men and men dance for women.'⁴⁵ The latter seems to be the case at Herod's birthday party, a female dancing for men and the men reacting sexually to the performance; yet, as noted, an elite girl dancing at a party would have been highly unusual. In the Jewish and Roman contexts of the first century CE, this dance could not but have had negative overtones.

Barbara Baert, who has analyzed artwork across several centuries related to this passage, remarks,

In all cultures the performative character of dance is charged with a connection to celebration, to giving thanks for reconciliation of the gods, but also with a connection to excess and the enormity of the trance. In Christianity as well, dance has always retained its ambiguity.⁴⁶

Mark's account of Salome's dance is connected to the excess implicit in Herod's birthday party, and as such it betrays this sense of ambiguity regarding dance in the Christian tradition. The New Testament writers seldom use words for 'dance' and 'dancing.' Mark uses a form of the verb *orcheomai* (to dance, 6:22; para. Mt. 14:6), as do Matthew and Luke in the parable of children in the marketplace (Mt. 11:17; Lk. 7:32). Luke also refers to dancing (*xoros*) in the parable of the lost son (15:25).⁴⁷ These uses are descriptive in their respective narratives. Other early Christian writings, however, depict joyful dancing. In the *Proto-Gospel of James*, a three-year-old Mary dances before the altar of the Lord (*Pros. Jas.* 7:10), and in the *Acts of John*, Jesus dances with his disciples at the last supper (*Acts John* 94–96).⁴⁸

In ancient Greece, dance was a central aspect of worship, and the Greeks believed the gods created dance. It was associated with virtually every religious and cultic event.⁴⁹ The performance of ritual-religious dance in the Mysteries and other rites was a significant means to incorporate the new initiates into 'the secrets of the gods and to the mental and physical contract with the Divine.'⁵⁰ Dance held a particularly central role in the Eleusinian Mysteries. The nine-day initiation rituals were punctuated by singing and dancing. Members of the cult worshipped Demeter and Korē as the goddesses of vegetation, fruit, and the dead, and their dancing and singing related to the topics of birth and death.⁵¹ The centrality of dance for the Eleusinian Mysteries and the fact that

Salome is the only character in the Gospels to dance is suggestive of Mark's desire to further connect these two girls.

In these ways, the author of Mark overlays the story of Salome with a veil of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The message is clear for Mark: the mother and daughter are evil. They do not deal in life but deal in death. In order to focus attention completely on Herodias and her daughter, Mark excludes the main character of the Gospel from this narrative. Jesus is conspicuously absent from this story, but his absence both focuses the spotlight on the negative, death dealing works of the mother and daughter and contrasts them with his life-giving work. Furthermore, the other daughter narratives that frame this one, in which Jesus brings back to life the daughter of Jairus and casts out the unclean spirit from the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman, makes this point clear: Jesus, the Son of God the Father, is the one who deals in life and has the power to overcome death.

Sowing seeds, God's mysterious reign, and casting pigs into the sea

To support this reading of Mark 6:14–29, I will now discuss a few other portions of the Gospel of Mark that suggest the author's rejection of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The parable of the sower (Mark 4:1–12) and Jesus's explanation of the parable (4:20) are particularly striking when heard as references to the Mysteries. First, as the grain goddess, mother Demeter was worshipped as the one who caused all grain to spring up from the earth in its due season. In contrast, the parable of the sower portrays Jesus as the sower of seed.⁵² The seed, however, grows by virtue of being sown in the proper kind of soil, not by the will of any god or goddess. Only good soil can elicit growth from the seed, and for Mark that 'powerful earth is the Kingdom of God,' which is activated by Jesus.⁵³ Moreover, in the parable of the sower, Jesus declares that those who hear are the ones who are given the *mysteria* (*mysterion*) of the reign of God (4:11).⁵⁴ Jesus goes on to paraphrase Isaiah 6:9, saying 'for those outside everything comes in parables in order that they may "indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven."' For Mark, those who entered the Eleusinian Mysteries, in which seeing the objects and hearing the story were crucial, would be among those who did not truly see and perceive or listen and understand. Only those who entered the reign of God that Jesus inaugurates would see and perceive and turn and be forgiven.

Second, in Jesus's explanation of parable of the sower (4:3–9), he compares four types of soil and the seed's reaction in each type of soil to four types of persons who hear the word of God and their reaction to it. The various types of soil correspond to the character groups in the Gospel: the seed that is sown along the path and is eaten by birds suggests the Pharisees, scribes, and Jerusalem religious leaders. The seed that falls in the rocky soil refers to those who initially accept the word, endure for a time, but then fall away when hardship comes along. Mark indicates that the disciples are among the rocky

soil because, like the seed that initially springs to life, they ‘immediately’ follow Jesus, but in the end fall away.⁵⁵ The thorny soil refers to those for whom the word is choked out by the cares of the world. Interestingly, Herod is the only character in the Gospel who explicitly fits this description.⁵⁶ The good soil are those persons who respond positively to Jesus. They are the minor characters whom Jesus heals. Whereas most of the children and parents in the Gospel fit into the last category, the Herodians do not. They are at best thorny soil, an unhappy landing place for seed usually associated with the cereal goddesses.

A third episode in Mark’s Gospel alluding to the cult of Demeter is the story of the healing of the Gerasene demoniac in Mark 5:1–10. In that scene, Jesus is in a non-Jewish area and is approached by a man possessed by unclean spirits. When the man initially sees Jesus, the man shouts, ‘what have you to do with me, Jesus son of the most high God?’ The Eleusinian Mysteries honored Iacchus (aka Dionysius, brother of Persephone) as the *theopaidia* (child or son of god). But this man, a gentile, recognizes Jesus instead as the true son of the true God. The man then refers to himself as ‘legions,’ a common term for a battalion of Roman soldiers. With this self-identification of the man, Mark is clearly denouncing the occupying Roman military forces.

After this exchange, Jesus casts the spirits out of the man and allows them to enter a herd of pigs. The pigs then dash themselves into the sea and drown. The Eleusinian Mysteries were famous for the sacrifice of piglets, to the point that initiates would commission statues of themselves holding a pig as a remembrance of their initiation.⁵⁷ According to Mylonas, the initiates took pigs to the sea, washed them, and then sacrificed them, specifically to drive out unclean spirits.⁵⁸ Mark turns this ritual upside-down as Jesus allows the unclean spirits to exit the man and enter the pigs, who then cast themselves into the waters and die. The point is clear: Jesus is the one with the power to drive out unclean spirits and heal, not Demeter.

Immediately following this exorcism is the first child narrative in Mark, the raising of Jairus’s daughter. That intercalated episode becomes the model for the other interactions Jesus has with children in the Gospel: faithful parents bring children to Jesus for healing or blessing. However, the next child in the Gospel is not the daughter of faithful parents but corrupt elites. The girl is not near ill or near death, but lively and dancing. And Jesus is not even present. The depiction of the mother, daughter, and (step)father in Mark 6:14–29 is then designed in part to continue to develop in the mind of the reader (or hearer) a negative perception about a very well-known mother and daughter, the grain goddesses, Demeter and Persephone.

Conclusion

In a diverse religious milieu consisting of both Jews and non-Jewish Greeks, the author of Mark had multiple audiences to whom his message had to appeal. In various portions of the Gospel, Mark’s audience could hear contrasts between the Jesus movement and the Eleusinian Mysteries. On

one hand, the Christian message of Jesus's resurrection was not unlike that of the mystery religions. Both brought an assurance of a better life after death, or eternal life. Yet Mark makes a case that Jesus the son and his father God are the ones who overcome death by rising again, and not the daughter goddess, Persephone, and her mother goddess, Demeter. This reality helps to explain why, among the many positive references to parents and children in the Gospel of Mark, there is a sole cynical story about a mother, her young daughter, and a kingly father. Their story was meant in part to draw to mind the otherwise positively viewed mother and daughter goddesses. Indeed, the author of the Gospel of Mark sought to make it clear that the true mysteries were not those that were seen in the rites of Demeter, but the reign of God inaugurated by Jesus.

Notes

- 1 For an in-depth treatment of these passages, see Sharon Betsworth, *Children in Early Christian Narratives* (London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2016). It is unclear if Mark casts the female slave in 14:66–69 as an adult or younger woman. The word used is *paidiske*, which seems to indicate an enslaved young woman. I would argue, however, given Mark's focus on and usual vocabulary for children in the ministry of Jesus, that he is not considering the *paidiske* in the passion narrative to be a child, i.e., twelve years or younger.
- 2 Demeter and Persephone are also referred to in several other writings such as Euripides, *Ion*, 1048–1081; Euripides, *Helen*, 1301–1368; Herodotus, *Histories*, 8.65.
- 3 The king's brother also plays a role in each narrative: Zeus's brother Hades abducts his bride Persephone; Herod's brother Philip, Herodias's living first husband, is the cause of John the Baptist's denunciation of Herod and Herodias's marriage.
- 4 While the name 'Mark' may refer to the actual author of the Gospel, the author of the Gospel of Mark is likely anonymous. For convenience, I will refer to the author as 'Mark' and use the pronoun 'he' to refer to the author, presuming that the author was a male.
- 5 See I.C. Mantle, 'The Roles of Children in Roman Religion,' *Greece & Rome* 49.1 (April 2002): 85–106; Ville Vuolanto, 'Faith and Religion,' in *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family in Antiquity* (ed. Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence; New York: Berg, 2010), 133–151.
- 6 I use 'Old Testament' here intentionally to include biblical books written not only in Hebrew but also in Greek, which are often relegated to the 'Apocrypha' in many Christian Bibles. Both sets of writings were a part of the Septuagint, the Bible for the earliest Christians.
- 7 Austin Busch, 'New Testament Narrative and Greco-Roman Literature,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative* (ed. Danna Nolan Fewell; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 61.
- 8 Busch, 'New Testament Narrative,' 61.
- 9 Busch, 'New Testament Narrative,' 67. Indeed, Greco-Roman rhetorical instruction encouraged writers to utilize 'literary imitation, emulation, and various forms

of rewriting' to significantly reform the earlier writing (Busch, 'New Testament Narrative,' 66); the Gospel writers followed this practice.

- 10 Maria Beatrice Bittarello, 'Re-Crafting the Past: The Complex Relationship between Myth and Ritual in the Contemporary Pagan Reshaping of Eleusis,' *Pomegranate* 10.2 (December 2008): 233.
- 11 For historical and literary context of the *Hymn*, see Helen Foley (ed.), *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- 12 This description of the *Hymn to Demeter* follows the discussion in my book *The Reign of God Is Such as These: A Socio-Literary Analysis of Daughters in the Gospel of Mark* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 62–63.
- 13 F. Sokolowski, 'On the Rules Regulating the Celebration of the Eleusinian Mysteries,' *Harvard Theological Review* 52.1 (January 1959): 3–5. This brief essay contains the text and translation of an inscription from Athens containing rules and ordinances of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Sokolowski notes,

We don't know much what privilege the children called *aphestias* enjoyed. It was certainly an honor bestowed on the offspring of rich and well-to-do families, quite often the Eumolpidia and Kerykes [two key Eleusinian families associated with the rites] themselves.

The statues erected for such children 'seem to indicate that they were initiated for a certain public purpose' (3).

- 14 Mara Lynn Keller, 'The Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone: Fertility, Sexuality, and Rebirth,' *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 4.1 (1988): 27–54.
- 15 George E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 243.
- 16 Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 226.
- 17 Keller, 'The Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone,' 51.
- 18 Christina Papaioannou, Katerina Mouratidou, Giannis Mouratidis, and Stella Douka, 'Association of Dance with Sacred Rituals in Ancient Greece: The Case of the Eleusinian Mysteries,' *Studies in Physical Culture & Tourism* 18.3 (December 2011): 233–239.
- 19 Papaioannou et al., 'Association of Dance,' 238.
- 20 Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 257.
- 21 Papaioannou et al., 'Association of Dance,' 238.
- 22 Nancy A. Evans, 'Sanctuaries, Sacrifices, and the Eleusinian Mysteries,' *Numen* 49.3 (2002): 246.
- 23 Carl Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter* (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1967), 16.
- 24 Cicero, *On the Laws* 2.24.36.
- 25 Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 280.
- 26 Greeks, however, continued praying to Demeter as St Demetra, the patron saint of agriculture, and the canonized male saint, Demetrius (Keller, 'The Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone,' 30).
- 27 Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 8.
- 28 Early church writers such as Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian comment, mostly negatively or inaccurately, about the Mysteries. For a discussion, see Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 287–316.

- 29 Evans, 'Sanctuaries, Sacrifices, and the Eleusinian Mysteries,' 251.
- 30 Susan M. Elliott, 'Choose Your Mother, Choose Your Master: Galatians 4:21–5:1 in the Shadow of the Anatolian Mother of the Gods,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118.4 (1999): 661–683.
- 31 Larry J. Kreitzer, "'Crude Language" and "Shameful Things Done in Secret" (Ephesians 5.4, 12): Allusions To the Cult of Demeter/Cybele in Hierapolis?' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 21.71 (January 1999): 51–77.
- 32 Kerenyi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, 106–107.
- 33 Betsworth, *The Reign of God Is Such as These*, 62–68, 115–125; see also Betsworth, *Children in Early Christian Narratives*, 56–62.
- 34 Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8* (Yale Anchor Bible; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 394.
- 35 For a discussion of the manuscript variations, see Betsworth, *The Reign of God Is Such as These*, 119.
- 36 Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.5.4.
- 37 Ville Vuolanto, 'Experience, Agency, and the Children in the Past: The Case of Roman Childhood,' in *Children and Everyday Life in the Roman and Late Antique World* (ed. Christian Laes and Ville Vuolanto; New York: Routledge, 2017), 15.
- 38 Vuolanto, 'Experience, Agency, and the Children in the Past,' 17. Emphasis mine. Kathleen Gallagher Elkins and Julie Faith Parker also emphasize the agency of the child in a text in their definition of 'childist' interpretation of the Bible as a method that

focuses on the agency and action of children and youth in the text, instead of seeing them primarily as passive or victimized. Along with feminist and womanist approaches, childist interpretation examines the construction and function of certain kinds of biblical characters while challenging traditional hegemonic assumptions.

(Kathleen Gallagher Elkins and Julie Faith Parker, 'Children in the Biblical Narrative and Childist Interpretation,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative* [ed. Danna Nolan Fewell; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016], 425)

- 39 *Korē* is also sometime spelled *kourē* in Ionic Greek.
- 40 All verses for the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* follow Helen Foley's translation (*The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 2–27).
- 41 BADG, sv. ὀρχέομαι.
- 42 Acts 6:5; Rom 8:8; 15:1–3; 1 Cor 7:32–34; 10:33; Gal 1:10; 1 Thess 2:4, 14; 4:1; 2 Tim 2:4 (Janice Capel Anderson, 'Feminist Criticism: The Dancing Daughter,' in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* [ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen Moore, 2nd ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008], 122).
- 43 Marcus notes several places in the Septuagint in which *ēresko* has sexual innuendos: Gen 19:8; Judg 14:1A, 3A, 7A; Add Esth 2:4, 9; Job 31:10. He also suggest that the use in 1 Cor 7:33–34 could be understood in this way (*Mark 1–8*, 396). Barbara Baert examines the history of interpretation of this passage through artwork. She asserts that in the artwork of the middle ages and early Renaissance, the daughter is depicted as a girl doing the will of her mother; yet by the high Renaissance, she becomes the 'seductive femme fatale' ('The Dancing Daughter and the Head of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14–29) Revisited: An Interdisciplinary Approach', *Louvain Studies* 38.1 (2014): 17).

- 44 Elkins and Parker, 'Children in the Biblical Narrative and Childist Interpretation,' 429.
- 45 Tal Ilan, 'Dance and Gender in Ancient Jewish Sources,' *Near Eastern Archaeology* 66.3 (September 2003): 136.
- 46 Baert, 'The Dancing Daughter and the Head of John the Baptist Revisited,' 13.
- 47 *Xoros* generally refers to a chorus or group dance. The related verb, *xoreuō*, does not appear in the New Testament.
- 48 Cited in Teresa J. Hornsby, 'The Dance of Gender: David, Jesus, and Paul,' *Neotestamentica* 48.1 (2014): 87.
- 49 Papaioannou et al., 'Association of Dance,' 234.
- 50 Papaioannou et al., 'Association of Dance,' 235.
- 51 Papaioannou et al., 'Association of Dance,' 237.
- 52 Tat-siong Benny Liew argues that this parable establishes Jesus's masculinity in its ancient Mediterranean context which could be understood as a further slight to the female deities. See 'Re-Mark-Able Masculinities: Jesus, the Son of Man, and the (Sad) Sum of Manhood?,' in *New Testament Masculinities* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 100–103.
- 53 Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspectives* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1989), 162.
- 54 This is the only use of *mysterion* in the Gospel of Mark; in the other Gospels, it is used only in the parallel texts (Mt 13:11; Lk 8:10). Paul, Deutro-Paul, and the Pastoral Letters, however, make frequent use of the word 'mystery.'
- 55 Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 154.
- 56 Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 158. The rich man in Mark 10:17–22 who walks away from Jesus sad due to his many possessions, may fit this category as well.
- 57 Evans, 'Sanctuaries, Sacrifices, and the Eleusinian Mysteries,' 242.
- 58 Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 249.

6 Children and the Church

The ritual entry of children into Pauline churches

John W. Martens

It can be difficult to say anything about the lives of children in Paul's churches, such as those in Galatia or Corinth, given how little Paul himself says directly about children, but children's lives speak to us in numerous ways, reminding us of their presence. Cavan Concannon writes that 'in her forensic examination of human remains from Corinth in the early Roman Empire, Sherry Fox has shown that, when compared with remains from Paphos in Crete, mortality rates for children were higher in Corinth.'¹ Fox's archeological evidence awakens us to the concrete reality of children's lives and deaths in Corinth during the Hellenistic and Roman period, which includes the formation of Paul's churches in the area. While no claims can be made regarding the impact of specific findings of this data on Corinthian churches, it creates a backdrop onto which the lives of Corinthian children must be projected.²

Fox, for instance, writes that 'paleopathological analysis of human remains themselves provides specific health data for individuals that can then be combined to reconstruct the overall health of a population.'³ When we look at the data gathered by Fox from Paphos and Corinth regarding infants and children, some broad conclusions can be drawn. Of the skeletal remains studied at Paphos and Corinth, a far greater percentage of children were found at Corinth (30.9%) than at Paphos (20.4%), which indicates that more people survived childhood in Paphos than Corinth.⁴ This data gives us a concrete piece of evidence regarding the vulnerability of childhood in antiquity, and Corinth in particular, but it also focuses our attention on the simple historical presence of children in a Pauline city.

And if you spend some time wandering through any of the Greek museums, which display artifacts from the ancient world, you will soon come across the material evidence of those children's lives. For example, at the small archeological museum at the site of ancient Corinth, there are at least five feeding bottles for infants,⁵ numerous terracotta dolls or parts of dolls,⁶ and a terracotta chariot figurine, as well as other pull toys and toy animals.⁷ Other Greek museums have on display toddlers' potties,⁸ baby rattles,⁹ a sculpture of a boy with a goose,¹⁰ combs, perfumes, and make-up containers for girls and women,¹¹ and large clay amphorae that served as the burial places for young

children.¹² These are only a sampling of ancient material artifacts portraying children, used by children, or made especially for parents' use with children. All of the artifacts listed are housed in modern museums located in cities to which Paul travelled or spent a considerable amount of time in antiquity. To think that Paul was not aware of the lives of children or the objects of childhood life in his travels throughout the Roman Empire or in his work with his churches is impossible to imagine, but it is also true that Paul does not speak much directly about the lives of children.¹³ Or, from another vantage, more optimistically, we have not listened carefully or paid attention to hear when Paul is speaking about children. This paper is concerned with paying attention to when Paul does speak about children, and also with filling in some of the blank spaces about the lives of children in the Pauline churches, as they relate to the ritual entry of children into the first-century churches that Paul (for the most part) founded and to which he subsequently wrote, or determining if there was a formal rite of entry for children into the Pauline churches.

The one passage where children's place in the family and community is directly noted is 1 Cor 7:12–16, but Paul's letter to the Galatians will also be examined in order to see if Paul's discussion of circumcision there might aid us in determining the implications of his theological arguments for the entry of children, boys and girls, into his churches. Some of this examination will include the reasonable expectation, on the basis of what we know about Greco-Roman children in religious, social, and familial contexts, of where children ought to be or might be in view, even if not discussed directly.¹⁴ Studies of children in antiquity must operate at times, as must all history, on hypothesis and conjecture, but given that children are noted in mixed marriages in 1 Corinthians 7:12–14 and as daughters (perhaps) to be married in 1 Corinthians 7:36–38,¹⁵ and the reality of the presence of children in all cross-generational community settings in antiquity, the question for Paul's churches is not whether children are present, but how they are present, and whether and how they became formal members of Paul's churches. While we must realise the limitations, naturally, of what we can say concretely, we should not shy away from reconstruction where evidence leads us in a certain direction and the data beyond Paul's letters strengthen these hypotheses. In this case, the argument will be made that we should consider that Pauline churches baptised children of all ages as a means of bringing children, male and female, Gentile and Jewish, into the body of Christ, the Church. While it is possible that Jewish infant boys whose parents were Christ-followers continued to be circumcised, at least for a short period historically, this is not certain, especially when we consider the need for long-term identity construction among those who belonged to the Church. In addition, even if circumcision might have remained an acceptable rite for Jewish boys, entrance into the ecclesial community required a process that transcended divisions of ethnicity and gender; baptism was this necessary rite.

Ritual entry into the community

The presence of children in Paul's churches is evoked by Beverly Gaventa, who writes that,

the early gatherings of Christians must also have been filled with birth and new life. In some gatherings, a midwife was called out to attend a delivery. In another, she returned – with joyous news or somber? In other gatherings, wet nurses brought their charges, whose fussing and cooing sprinkled the reading of Paul's letter. However removed the Roman notion of children and childhood might be from that of the contemporary West, the sights and smells and sounds of infants could not be alien to these assemblies.¹⁶

Neither, I would argue, would the sights and sounds of older boys and girls, slave and free, be alien from these assemblies. But their presence gives rise to further questions: given that there was a process in Judaism for boys to be brought formally into the community through circumcision, and we know that children were engaged in a variety of religious rites and practices in the broader Greco-Roman culture,¹⁷ was there a means or process in Paul's churches for children, infants and older, to enter formally into the Church, to be considered one of the disciples of Jesus? Would such a means of entry only be available for boys, like circumcision? Or would there be a rite, such as baptism, available to boys and girls of all ages? Or was no rite available and Christian boys and girls, like Jewish girls, would belong to the community by virtue of birth?¹⁸ As we shall see, the evidence can take us in a few directions.

Circumcision and the mother goddess

To start to answer these questions, I want to begin with Galatians as a way to imagine the presence of children in the midst of cross-cultural, hybrid communities, in which theological arguments are not divorced from social realities but have profound implications on the place of children in the community.¹⁹ Galatians, for many good reasons, has been read as Paul's theological treatise on justification, law, and faith *par excellence*, or at least vies with Romans for the title, but this has also meant that the letter has too often been abstracted from its social and cultural contexts, particularly those of the recipients.

Susan Elliott's 2003 book, *Cutting Too Close for Comfort*, does much to rectify the situation by placing Paul's theological thought in its particular social and cultural context.²⁰ In her book, Elliott gathers up evidence for reading Galatians in light of how its first recipients might have read the letter, especially in terms of the Anatolian mother goddess, who went by a number of names, but was often called Cybele, and her most devoted adherents, the *galli*, who showed particular devotion by castrating themselves as youth and later engaging in public displays of the frenzied activity of self-mutilation.²¹ Elliott argues that Paul's arguments against circumcision in Galatians are

set not just in the context over disputed definitions and self-definitions of belonging in Judaism, but should be read in the context of the religious milieu of the cult of the mother goddess. In Galatians, she argues, Paul is drawing an exaggerated connection between the Galatians' desire to cut their foreskins and the self-mutilating and castrated adherents of Cybele.

She builds her argument to a large extent on the basis of Paul's allegory in Gal 4: 21–31, in which she demonstrates that the slave mother, the mountain in Arabia associated with Hagar, maps onto the role of the mother goddess in Anatolia, often called by the name of nearby mountains, but that the mother Sarah, the mother of the free children, is not called by her given name by Paul, nor is she associated with a mountain, distancing her from the Anatolian naming practice of the cult of the mother goddess.²² The whole of this familial discussion of mothers and children comes following the discussion in Gal 3:23–4:7 of the Galatians as children coming to maturity and just prior to Paul's description of the Galatians as his 'little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you' (Gal 4:19). This entire section of Galatians, that is, is suffused in the imagery of mothers and children, those who are just being born and those who are coming of age. Elliott's contextualisation of Paul's arguments with respect to the cult of the mother goddess and the *galli* is convincing, and though her careful arguments cannot be recited here in full, it is important to note that the *galli*, in much of the remaining ancient documentation mentioning them, are called *pais*, children, or slaves, depending on context, and that the select adherents who mutilated their flesh seem to have been children, including what we would categorise as teenagers.²³

There is a tendency to think of Paul's argumentation in Galatians regarding circumcision abstractly, or, if not abstractly, to think of those being circumcised or desiring circumcision as adult Gentile males alone. But what about the children of the Galatians? Elliott's focus on the *galli* does not just give us a comparison in terms of the cutting of the skin, but alerts us to children in the religious realm, whether in Paul's churches, other Jewish communities, or among the adherents of Cybele. Circumcision as the entry requirement into Judaism could certainly be performed on adult male proselytes, but since the *galli* were generally children or youth when brought into formal and cultic relationship with the mother goddess, Paul's arguments might be focused as well as a means to try and convince the Galatian churches not to circumcise their sons, whether teenagers, boys, or infant boys, since this is a practice not just of Judaism but of other another cult.²⁴

The sharp, shocking comparison Paul makes between *nomos* and *stoicheia* in Galatians might be intended to convince the Gentile Galatians not to bring their children into the covenant through an entrance ritual, circumcision, a practice of the *nomos*, that he claims is essentially the equivalent of the castration and self-mutilation of the young adherents of the mother goddess, a practice of the *stoicheia*. If circumcision is being practised by the Galatians, even if Paul is focused on the adult males, the rite must include older boys and infant boys. The continuing practice of circumcision, or even the discussion of it, in Galatia orients us to consider how males became Christ-followers,

including boys of all ages, but also on who is excluded ritually by practising such a rite. It also forces us to see that the modes of identity in Paul's churches were diverse, overlapping, and in the process of being formed, something we will discuss below, that is, the process of self-identification for members of Paul's churches is even now being born, as Paul himself says in Gal. 4:19. This issue of identity and self-definition, not just for adults in the community but for the children, will be taken up more fully below.

Apart from the (possible) connection of circumcision to the worship of the mother goddess and the *galli* that Paul draws is that it is an exclusionary rite, not simply in etic terms of defining who is in and who is outside a group, but in emic terms of excluding some within the community. Exclusion would apply here not just to uncircumcised Gentile men, but also to infant and older boys, not to mention Gentile girls and women. As far as we know, there was no particular Jewish rite for female proselytes at this time.²⁵ Jewish girls were born into the covenant, and so a part of the covenant from birth; there was no equivalent entrance ritual as circumcision for girls. Gentile girls whose Gentile parents were Christ-followers would not have an equivalent method of entry into the Church as Gentile boys if circumcision of the flesh was still being practised in Pauline churches. This is problematic for the creation of a new community, in which clear boundaries must be established, even if from the outside the boundaries seem arbitrary, porous, and ever-shifting. Would birth be sufficient in Paul's new churches to indicate the belonging of girls in his churches, as it was for belonging in the broader Jewish covenant? Would circumcision of boys in Galatia, for instance, be seen as excluding girls from belonging? Joshua Garroway's article on baptism and circumcision is important for this entry discussion, especially regarding the otherwise exclusion of girls, as a means for all people, child or adult, to enter into the Galatian Church.²⁶ Important in this regard, then, and perhaps another issue underlying Paul's concern with circumcision in Galatia, is that the mother goddess's adherents, the *galli*, were males only, who entered as teens or boys.

If Paul's argument against circumcision in Galatia has inclusion and boundary setting as a possible motive, does this indicate baptism as a possible entrance ritual also for children at this early stage? While baptism is not a major point of discussion within Galatians, the one reference to baptism is significant, and even more so in the context of the *galli* and Cybele and the inclusion of all, male and female, child and adult.²⁷ The covenant of Abraham (and Sarah) is obviously the overarching context for Paul's letter, but if we see in the background the specter of the cult of the mother goddess eliminating females from inclusion in the rites, and circumcision as drawing only Gentile males into the covenant, Paul's claim that 'in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith' takes on even more significance. As Paul goes on to say,

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.
(Gal 3:26–28)

These verses present baptism as an inclusive welcoming call for all, as well as the key to establishing belonging: it is not circumcision, it is not birth, it is baptism.²⁸ Why, however, would this rite include only women and men and not girls and boys, whatever their age, to enter this new sort of community? Apart from later Christian confessional disputes, are there reasons to assume children were not baptised in Paul's communities? Given the fluidity of childhood in antiquity, it is important to note that no arguments are made against child baptism nor are age restrictions discussed in any of Paul's letters. This is not an attempt to engage later confessional arguments for or against infant baptism, it is simply drawing out the implications of the place of children in religious and ethnic communities in antiquity and the possible implications of the rejection of infant, youth, and adult male circumcision on Galatian Christ-followers. Entry into Paul's Church for children would be far more likely to take place through baptism not through the cutting of flesh.

A recent work by Mark Nanos on circumcision in Paul's communities, however, both supports and challenges at least some of the implications of how I am understanding ritual entry for children into Paul's community in Galatia.²⁹ While Nanos is not mainly focused on children, he does specifically mention children, particularly eight-day-old boys, in his discussion of circumcision in Paul's letters. Nanos argues that Paul's prohibition on circumcision is limited *only* to adult male, Gentile Christ-followers, not eight-day-old infant Jewish boys or eight-day-old infant Gentile boys.³⁰ What are most helpful in the context here are Nanos's explicit comments regarding infant boys, that is, that he believes that Paul desired all infant boys to be circumcised, which runs counter to my understanding of Paul's desires for Gentile Galatians, and for Gentiles in his other churches, but does acknowledge the presence of children in Paul's communities.

Nanos's understanding is based upon his belief that Paul did not oppose circumcision for Jews who were disciples of Jesus Christ, but only for certain non-Jews. This means for Nanos that Paul believed there would be no change in the Jewish practice of circumcising infant sons and, even more, that Paul would have no opposition to 'non-Jews committing their infant sons to circumcision.'³¹ Beyond the question of circumcision itself, this raises questions, if Nanos is correct, about what it meant to be a child in the Church and how a child came to belong in a community of Christ-believers.

Was circumcision for all infant boys, Jewish and non-Jewish, as Nanos suggests? What age would be considered proper for a boy to be circumcised if he was raised, for seven years let's say, as a Gentile prior to his parents entering one of Paul's churches? At what point would Nanos see this practice not being offered to non-Jewish boys, that is, in the actual lifespan of a boy and, more broadly, in the lifespan of Paul's communities? If the members of the nations who follow Christ were to remain members of the nations, as Nanos argues, why would their infant boys get circumcised?³² Why does it matter if non-Jewish boys get circumcised, since it is the end of the age? Does it matter as an identity marker? Would these boys also be baptised in addition

to circumcision? Would baptism be seen as a rite instead of or in addition to circumcision? Would girls, infant or otherwise, enter in through baptism also?

These questions are meant to provoke thought about the nature of the life of children, especially as defined by entrance rites, into the Christian community. The liminal existence created by circumcision for infant boys, or all boys, in the community does not well account for the integration of children into the community as part of one body, especially for girls who are Gentiles. What Nanos has done in this study is quite positive in recognising the lives of children, and how they are impacted by Paul's theologising, but the ongoing lives of children seems to be, though mentioned, unintegrated or even unconsidered. The most significant passage in this respect, something mentioned only once, is with respect to non-Jewish infant sons. Nanos mentions Jewish infant sons, and their expected circumcision, on numerous occasions. But on one occasion, Nanos writes,

Paul's arguments to resist being circumcised have nothing to do with opposing Jewish parents committing their eight-day-old sons to this rite, *or of non-Jews committing their infant sons to circumcision either*, just as they are not about women (the circumcision of whom interpreters assume was not the concern of Paul or those with whom he argued). Rather, his arguments are specifically directed to and about whether *adult, male, non-Jews* should undertake circumcision.³³

The question of the place of children in the Pauline communities, especially their relationship to the entrance rites among the disciples of Jesus, is truly problematised with this statement. It is one thing for Paul to say that adult males who are not Jews should not be circumcised; one has here a theological argument against the necessity of circumcision as an entrance rite. On the other hand, we know that each of these adult males was baptised into the community, whether Jewish or not, as would be every woman, whether Jewish or not, and called upon to take on the behaviors and traditions of the Pauline community in their lives. Yet, if Jewish boys are being circumcised and Paul has nothing against non-Jews circumcising their infant sons, the purpose which Nanos suggests in non-Jewish males not getting circumcised—that is, that they remain non-Jews called into the Messianic community at the end of the age—crumbles. Why would their sons be circumcised? But if only Jewish infants were being circumcised, it would create a significant social barrier between groups. It is essential to think more deliberately and concretely about how the children of Jews or Gentiles were being brought into community in Paul's early churches. Are we certain infant boys are being circumcised and that Paul approves of this? How do we know Paul's arguments against circumcision for Gentiles impacts only adult males? Are we certain baptism is not the key entry rite for all children, as it encompasses girls also? And, finally, are we certain any entrance rite was seen as essential?

Baptism for all, including children

On these scores, Joshua Garroway offers us another manner of thinking about community entry for boys and girls, one which is more sympathetic to Elliott's treatment by virtue of being open to Greco-Roman realities in a Jewish context, that is, by allowing space for conceptions of hybridisation to flourish.³⁴ What Elliott does is allow us to think about the children in Paul's churches as both Jewish and Greek, or Anatolian, who are becoming 'something else' in the amalgam of people found in Paul's churches. Who are the children in the midst of a new community that their parents or someone else has chosen for them? What are they now? What is necessary for the children to belong in this mixture?

Garroway focuses on circumcision, as does Nanos, as the marker of male Jewish identity and the primary mode of conversion for male Gentiles: 'circumcision was the transformative final step in a male gentile's becoming a Jew: male gentiles, but obviously not women.'³⁵ But Garroway also raises a significant question, which is relevant both for the question of bringing in children to Paul's communities and the inclusion of all those who are not born Jewish: 'absent circumcision, what was the transformative final step in a female's becoming a proselyte?'³⁶ This is an important question in considering children in Paul's churches as well, that is, what rite brought boys and girls into the church? Garroway does not address directly the matter of children, but his answer opens the way to see the children and how their place in the church, whether boy or girl, Jew or Gentile, might have been gained within the language and context of circumcision, even if the physical cutting of the foreskin was no longer employed.

Garroway claims that

Paul does not repudiate circumcision in favor of Baptism; he does not replace circumcision with Baptism as the mode of entry into God's covenant people. Rather, Paul retains circumcision as the initiatory Jewish rite, but reinterprets it so that, in the wake of Christ, circumcision is achieved *through* Baptism ... Far from replacing the discriminatory circumcision with the universalizing Baptism, Paul universalizes circumcision itself, making it possible for all people to be circumcised.³⁷

Since baptised Gentiles have been circumcised spiritually, 'to circumcise them (again) would constitute mutilation (Phil. 3:2)'—note the echo of Elliott's language here—'and would deny the effect of Christ's death and resurrection (Gal 5:11).'³⁸ Garroway states that this opens up entry into 'the covenant of circumcision' for Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free persons, men and women, as we see in Galatians 3:28.³⁹ Finally, 'Paul's point is that Baptism into Christ makes any person – whether Jew, Greek, slave, free, man, or woman – into a descendant of Abraham and an heir, according to the promise, and as such, circumcised.'⁴⁰ 'Makes any person ... into a descendant of Abraham' should

include—on this we should be clear—boys and girls, whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free.

Garroway's answer is compelling as to Paul's view of circumcision, and when children are explicitly placed in view it also encapsulates Elliot's concern, that she finds in Galatians specifically, that Paul wants to repudiate the cutting of flesh (for children or others) so as to distance his communities from the *galli* and their practices of self-mutilation. It makes sense of the theological significance that circumcision holds for Paul in his letters, and Nanos's insight that Paul is unwilling to let the practice go, even if we understand the practice differently than Nanos; it is not just that Paul urges the adult Gentile males not to have the rite physically inscribed on their flesh, but that all members of the community have the rite spiritually inscribed on their hearts.⁴¹ And it makes sense of the Church as a 'new creation' (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17), a community in a liminal, mediating, hybrid space, carving out a place that rejects some practices (castration of the *galli* and the physical circumcision of males), whether Jewish or Gentile, reinterprets some practices (circumcision is a spiritual process for men and women, boys and girls), and supports new practices (baptism for all) in order to become some new entity. Caroline Johnson Hodge describes this by claiming that 'once again, as with the image of the seed in Galatians, Paul's description of this new creation produces a mixed identity. These gentile bodies are now also Christ's Jewish body.'⁴² What is essential to keep in mind is that no 'new' thing can emerge without means by which people, including children, can be brought in to belong.⁴³ There must be means of entry and belonging, by which children are incorporated into a new community and mode of being.

Proponents of the Radical Perspective on Paul, such as Nanos, rightly want to cast aside a simplistic comparison of new (universal) 'Christianity' with the old (particularistic) 'Judaism.'⁴⁴ Whatever Paul is doing, it is grounded in the many Judaism(s) of the day, as well as the ethnic, cultural, and social realities which those from outside Judaism would bring. Yet, Jews themselves, Paul included, were not unshaped by the world in which they lived. Judaism was not something separate from the variety of Hellenisms around it, including worship of the Anatolian mother goddess. Paul's churches, whether one sees them still predominantly as an offshoot of Judaism or predominantly mixed communities of Jew and Gentile, or some hybrid of burgeoning new communities, soon to be called 'Christian,' must be considered in all cases new things because Paul is helping to mold into existence a new community of people. And Paul does speak of the Church as a new thing in 1 Corinthians 10:31–33, writing 'Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved.'⁴⁵

The Church of God, in which Paul attempts 'to please everyone in everything I do,' this new community of people, includes children, which means that the way things were done in Greek or Roman religious rites, or Anatolian religious rites, or in Jewish religious rites, must change, or develop, or be re-interpreted because there must be a new means of bringing people into

community and into relationship.⁴⁶ Ander Kloostergaard Petersen argues persuasively that there is never a 'pure' example of religion nor culture, nor, I would say, any such person.⁴⁷ Hybridity is at the heart of the creation of new communities and the people who are found in them, even though it can be found anywhere.

No group, including the earliest Galatian church, is purely or entirely any one cultural or religious 'thing,' not entirely Jewish or Greek or Anatolian, or Galatian, or even Christ-followers.⁴⁸ Early churches were comprised of many people, all of whom had unique relationships to various forms of Judaism or Gentile cultural and religious traditions and even the emerging traditions of the disciples of Jesus.⁴⁹ And everyone had internalised different aspects of these groups, including their rites. Petersen outlines the complexity of these relationships, indicating how 'Paul's engagement with Hellenism did neither exclude nor reduce his belongingness to Judaism.'⁵⁰ Petersen sketches the 'identical, similar, or overlapping traditions' using a Venn diagram to point out that one could be a Jew, engaged with Roman culture, Syriac culture, Greek culture, Anatolian culture, and the Christ-movement.⁵¹ The significant takeaway, though, is that probably no one in antiquity, nor many people today, think of themselves in this way, as borrowing, adapting, innovating, or using new and old ideas as they interpret their traditions. Certainly, Paul thought only that he was doing something new, through Christ, in his churches. This is important for thinking about the Galatian churches, for Paul would not be thinking consciously about creating boundaries but about defining what it means to follow and belong to Christ. Paul's arguments about circumcision, therefore, would have much to do with how the boys and girls being raised in these churches would relate to the other traditions and what their main point of cultural and religious identity would be as they are raised in the church.⁵² It is not an argument that those in Paul's churches from our point of view would not have fluid, hybrid identities, but that Paul is concerned with how to have these children identify with Christ as their primary allegiance, their self-definition, to create a sense of belonging.

Paul is grounded in and balancing the many manifestations of Judaism and Hellenism in which he finds himself, not as a disinterested outside observer, but as someone from the inside attempting to create or bring forward the new age inaugurated by Christ in his communities. He is not necessarily consciously picking and choosing from this or that strand of culture or religion, nor consciously rejecting this or that part of Judaism or Anatolian religion, but attempting to bring into practice communities dedicated to the worship of Jesus Christ. In this context, what matters for Paul is the construction of the communities, entry into the community, belonging in the community, and remaining in the community. This means that there must have been ways for children to enter and, it seems to me, that Garroway gives us the best path forward to understanding such entry: baptism for all, understood as including a spiritual circumcision, available to male and female, slave and free, adult and child. If children were accepted into the churches and played roles, formal and informal, in the life and worship of the church, as children played roles in other forms of Judaism and in other Greco-Roman religions, baptism was

probably already the formal entry ritual for children during the life and ministry of Paul. 1 Cor 7:12–16, however, complicates the matter.

Children in community: 1 Cor 7:14

Children are mentioned explicitly in 1 Cor 7:12–16, specifically in verse 14: ‘for the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children (*hymōn tekna*) would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.’⁵³ This short acknowledgment of mixed marriages assumes a few important things: that there are such marriages; that these marriages in Corinth are assumed to impact multiple children and families (*hymōn* and *tekna* are both plural); that either the husband or wife might be a Christ-follower; and that whoever is a Christ-follower—male or female—creates a sacral environment of holiness for the whole family, including the unbelieving spouse.⁵⁴ That the children are ‘unbelievers’ seems to be assumed, since their ‘holiness’ is dependent upon the believing parent. As Shaye Cohen writes, ‘Paul thinks that either a Christian father or a Christian mother could “consecrate” the children to Christ.’⁵⁵

The situation Paul outlines cannot be hypothetical, but an acknowledgment of the social and practical implications of belief in Jesus for the families of early disciples. These children must be under the age of majority, either boys or girls, as they are assumed to live with their parents and, in addition, following a divorce or separation, Paul assumes their household religious status would be impacted, that is, they would no longer be holy. Holiness seems to reside in the context of the family and community of believers, even if only one parent were a believer. The fact that only one parent need be a Christ-believer, male or female, suggests, too, that rites of belonging were not based upon gender, such as circumcision, but it seems to challenge the need for children to enter the community at all in a formal manner, such as through baptism, as suggested above. If Paul grounds the holiness of the children in the holiness of one believing parent, suggesting that being a part of the family is what grants or imbues righteousness, does this indicate that no religious entry rites were practised in Paul’s churches for children? Had Paul adopted both matrilineal and patrilineal integration of children into the community? Did children only need to enter the Church of their own accord through baptism when they left their own families, either through marriage or some other means? Or did Paul’s boundary lines change depending upon the church with which he is speaking and the situation in that particular city or region?

Shaye Cohen states that

any ethnic group that gives itself a name is implicitly or explicitly naming itself in opposition to some other named group, claiming that its members are not the members of some other group, and asserting that its members constitute an “us” versus the members of other groups who constitute a “them”.⁵⁶

While I think that the reality on the ground is more fluid than this—there are multiple levels of belonging and multiple groups to which one might belong simultaneously—the categorisation of ‘us’ and ‘them’ seems basically correct. Paul does seem, by virtue of claiming community belonging for the children through the membership of one parent, to be drawing a boundary line as to who is in and out, which is not necessarily dependent upon the faith or even behavior, ritual or otherwise, of the children.

As David Horrell stresses, to call the children ‘holy’ is not a minor claim, either in terms of belonging or in terms of theological and religious claims:

As is well known, ἅγιος is one of the most common Pauline designations for members of the assemblies, frequently used in the opening epistolary greetings (e.g. Rom 1.7; 1 Cor 1.2; 2 Cor 1.1; Phil 1.1). As 1 Cor 6:1–2 makes clear, it draws the boundary between ‘in’ and ‘out’, or between church and world. ἅγιος functions as a designation of identity, and specifically in relation to this boundary issue: when the circle is drawn to determine in and out, those who are ἅγιος are within the community; they share the identity of insider. Notable here is the difference in Paul’s description of the unbelieving spouse and the children: the former is ‘sanctified’ (ἡγίασται) by the believer, despite remaining ἄπιστος, such that the union is licit (not immoral) as are its offspring. Only the children are emphatically and unambiguously described as ἅγιος.⁵⁷

Jerome Murphy-O’Connor argues that ‘the mere fact that Paul argues from the attitude of the Corinthians towards their children is based on the presupposition that they knew what he meant when he said that their children were holy.’⁵⁸ This is an important point, but Murphy-O’Connor goes on to ground the children’s belonging on the basis of their moral behavior, that their presence in the community has a sanctifying and transforming impact on the lives of the children, something which cannot be demonstrated.⁵⁹ Whatever the Corinthians know about what Paul stated, all we know is that the children belong by virtue of parentage, not moral development. Yonder Moynihan Gillihan focuses precisely on such belonging, stating that the children ‘have full access to the temple constituted by the sanctified community,’ where they can participate in the life of the church, but he correctly does not ground their belonging in moral development or ethical behavior.⁶⁰

The apocalyptic context of Paul’s own letters, and the specific context of 1 Cor 7, might give us a clue as to why holiness in the family is the context in which Paul mentions children specifically and also why children are not mentioned more directly or more often in other contexts. MacDonald and Vaage explain that

Paul did not explain the purpose of this project as principally to acquire a greater measure of holiness or to withdraw from the uncleanness of the profane world. Rather, the basic meaning of his ascetical stance is

stated succinctly in 1 Cor 7:31: 'For the form of this world is passing away' (παράγει γὰρ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου). Likewise, in Phil 3:20 Paul claims, 'For our citizenship is in heaven,' that is, not here (ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει). The current arrangement of reality has no enduring future and therefore, according to Paul, should have no hold on the early Christian's deepest loyalty, social orientation, or personal identity.⁶¹

Marriage in Paul's theological thought, which is basically found in 1 Corinthians 7, must now be considered with respect to its implications for eternity, not primarily the earthly concerns of raising children. Children are mentioned and considered only where the status of a marriage might implicate their eternal destiny. Scholars have struggled to understand, with good reason, what Paul is driving at when he proclaims that the children in a mixed marriage, due to the faith of the one Christian parent, would not be 'unclean' but 'holy,' but for Paul it is a simple statement of reality.⁶²

Paul's analogy in 1 Cor 5 regarding the need to purify the *ekklesia*, or maintain purity, might help us make sense of the children being holy by virtue of their membership in a family. In casting out the man who is living with his step-mother, Paul draws on the image of cleaning out the yeast during Passover: 'Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened' (1 Cor 5:6–7). Paul goes on to make clear the practical implications of his analogy, writing that the Corinthians are 'not to associate with sexually immoral persons' (1 Cor 5:9), which means for Paul not even to eat with people judged immoral within the community. Jonathan Klawans writes that 'Paul's point would appear to be that the integrity – the *moral purity* – of the community can be threatened by the continued presence of grave sinners.'⁶³ It is this language, specifically from 1 Corinthians 6, that Johnson Hodge says allows Paul to draw 'boundaries around the gentiles with purity language, asserting that they have become pure, like priestly bodies or like the Temple itself.'⁶⁴

Moral purity is an element of the community itself, which is why it was to be guarded so carefully. Klawans dismisses the idea that ritual purity is a concern to Paul, suggesting that moral impurity itself is enough in Leviticus 18:29 and later in Jubilees to render someone unfit to be in community with the people of Israel.⁶⁵ 'Backsliding insiders' does seem to be Paul's particular concern, since 'social contact, even marriage with unbelievers was tolerated.'⁶⁶ Paul's own concern for this issue might have emerged from within his circle of co-workers, since Timothy, whom Paul considers and calls his son, was 'the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek' (Acts 16:1).⁶⁷ A person married to a Christ-follower, who was not a believer, did not make the community or his/her family impure; moral impurity arose, often if not exclusively, from sexual behavior. Children, therefore, are within the sphere of holiness if they are in one of the Church's families, even in a mixed marriage, but it is a moral holiness based on the marriage of the parents, not a ritual holiness.

What does this moral purity mean for the children, though, with respect to entry into the Church? As Johnson Hodge states, one branch of this moral purity among the earliest followers of Jesus understood the people of God as the temple of God, that is, the *ekklêsia* as God's sanctuary, or the temple for all nations.⁶⁸ Ben F. Meyer particularly traces this theme to Jesus's own preaching and the teaching of the *Hebraioi* of the Jerusalem *ekklêsia*, developed from the prophetic theme of the eschatological pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem.⁶⁹ At least one of the ways in which Paul had maintained, and transposed, this meaning is found in 1 Cor 6:12–20 in which Paul discusses *porneia* with prostitutes, arguing that 'your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body' (vv. 19–20). The Church as temple is stressed by the second-person plural verbs and pronouns, indicating that improper sexual behavior impacts the corporate nature of the body, as already seen in 1 Cor 5. The body of the church, ransomed by Christ, is intended to glorify God. While the word holiness is not used here, the complex of temple (*naos*), rejection of moral impurity, and the call to glorify God call forth the primary contexts of holiness. If the *ekklêsia* is the temple of God, the people in it must be holy. Johnson Hodge makes the same point, writing,

Paul uses language to describe the gentiles as holy, language which has to do with access to the temple cult. This is most explicit when Paul asserts that the gentiles are temples themselves (1 Cor. 6:19; 3:16–17). This architectural metaphor suggests bodies that are protected, sanctified, and bounded from other types of space; yet they are also inhabited by God's *pneuma* (6:19; 3:16) and are therefore holy (3:17). Baptism has thus sanctified the gentiles so they can be a dwelling place for God.⁷⁰

Here it would be worthwhile to examine again Paul's own understanding of what it means to be a 'new creation' in the ecclesial context of a Pauline community, since this too calls us to consider holiness, but here to understand it not as liminal group precisely but as theologically loaded self-understanding. For Paul, Christ's death and resurrection, into which disciples are incorporated through baptism, indicates that 'the old order was finished, all was new.'⁷¹ 'New creation' means for Paul to be 'in Christ' (Gal 6:15), a place where neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything (2 Cor 5:17). One was either 'in Christ,' righteous, or outside the body of Christ, unrighteous and as Paul used righteous and unrighteous these were 'contradictory states. One could not be simultaneously both.'⁷² But one became righteous through faith in Christ, whether Jewish or Gentile, and entry into Christ through baptism.

Early disciples of Jesus, Jewish and Gentile, certainly appropriated a new sense of identity in their allegiance with Christ crucified and resurrected, and this identity 'allowed scope for various concrete self-definitions, simultaneous and successive,' that is, identity developed in a variety of situations.⁷³ But identity is answering the questions, who and what are we? If identity is gained by putting off the old self and putting on the new self (Rom 6:5–11; Gal

2:17–20), if baptism is a sharing in Christ's death, and living in conformity to Christ's life, either the children should be baptised or Paul really has not worked out fully how children enter the *ekklêsia*. Baptism, it seems, is the most likely reality for children in Paul's churches, but we must also continue to weigh another option: Paul is continuing to work these things out from *ekklêsia* to *ekklêsia* through lived experience.

In 1 Cor 7:14 it seems that Paul has arrived at the conclusion that the children somehow, in some way, must be 'in Christ'; they must be 'righteous,' they must be part of the 'new creation,' they must be holy even if only one parent has been baptised.⁷⁴ Oscar Cullmann's study of baptism in the New Testament remains relevant for our discussion.⁷⁵ He argues that 1 Cor 7:14 points to the incorporation of all children born into the community as sanctified, but seems also to suggest that this 'idea of collective holiness' might indicate that baptism for children born into these communities is dispensable.⁷⁶ Indeed, he also states that Paul

proclaims the holiness of Christian children on the ground of their natural birth. He consequently does not deem their baptism as necessary and he implicitly but completely precludes a supplementary adult baptism of those children already born into the covenant of the saints.⁷⁷

Yet, how Cullmann knows that Paul precludes a subsequent baptism is unclear.

In his concurrent discussion of the relationship of circumcision to baptism, he acknowledges the central character of both of these rites for drawing people into covenant relationship, which clearly in Judaism includes infant boys, but does not believe it has implications for baptism of children either as infants or at a later date in childhood.⁷⁸ He does acknowledge Joachim Jeremias's claim that holiness attained by birth could not be the last word in early Christianity, but he does not speculate as to when this began to take place or at what age children began to be baptised.⁷⁹ The link between circumcision and baptism, though, found already in Galatians, strengthens the claim that the reception of children through baptism began fairly early in the Pauline churches. Although Paul's discussion of mixed marriages complicates the discussion, it should not settle it. The evidence of Galatians suggests that entry into the community for children must usually have been by virtue of infant or child baptism, whether boy or girl, Jew or Gentile.

Faced with a complicating reality in Corinth, Paul must consider the liminal nature of the lives of children in these mixed marriages. If the unbelieving partner did not wish his or her children to enter the Church, Paul is saying that their ecclesial standing remained that of the morally pure, sharing in the holiness of the believing partner and their intact marriage, grafted into the body of Christ. On the other hand, Paul, I would argue, assumes that marriages in which both spouses belonged to the Church would have children who entered the Church through the ritual means of baptism and be holy on their own account. It is also possible that Paul is saying that all children

within the Church's orbit, prior to entering the Church through baptism at some later stage, are morally pure. Udo Schnelle argues that

the unbelieving spouse and children of the Christian partner are included within the realm where the Spirit is effective. They are thus snatched from the clutches of the other powers, but they do not yet share in eschatological σωτηρία. Paul does not advocate the view of the church as a *corpus permixtum* (mixed body); for him the church is, rather, the realm of purity and holiness within which those who have been baptized live, separated from the power of sin. Thus, both for their own sake and for the sake of the church, evildoers must be excluded.⁸⁰

This means the children must belong 'inside,' that is, they cannot be excluded. Baptism must be the essential means by which inclusion takes place, even if in (some?) mixed marriages Paul accepts a transitional, but real, belonging that will later be sealed through baptism.

Conclusions

In Galatians the push against circumcision leads more directly to imagining the inclusion of all children through baptism. In 1 Cor 5–7, Paul's focus seems more on the Church as impermeable body, into which only the pure can belong, and so on the spot a means of recognising the children as part of the body of Christ is advanced. These issues remained to be worked out completely in Paul's churches. Were children baptised in all of Paul's churches? Were even infants baptised? It seems they must have been, since they are a part of the community of the holy, the body of Christ. Yet within mixed marriages we cannot be certain of the status of children and it seems Paul was willing to grant entry to children in these hybrid situations in the hope, I would argue, that at some point they themselves would enter the Church on their own or through their parents' accord.

Given that circumcision brought boys into the Jewish community as infants and Greco-Roman children participated in household rites from a young age, why would children not participate in the rituals of the Church from a young age? There existed in antiquity no modern concerns about children deciding on their faith for themselves, just a desire to incorporate them into the family and larger community. And if the Church is family, why would they not be incorporated at the earliest possible point? The children were present in Paul's churches, and they became members through baptism, probably baptised immediately after birth or with their families, however old they were, when their parents became members of Paul's churches. 1 Cor 7:12–14 does not, it seems to me, overturn this basic scenario, except to suggest that children of mixed marriages were sometimes considered nascent members, until some later point at which formal entry through baptism took place, either by their own or their parents' choice, or until they made the decision to leave the community.

Notes

- 1 Cavan Concannon, 'Negotiating Multiple Modes of Religion and Identity in Roman Corinth,' in *The First Urban Churches 2: Roman Corinth* (ed. James R. Harrison and L.L. Welborn; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), 98; Sherry C. Fox, 'Health in Hellenistic and Roman Times: The Case Studies of Paphos, Cyprus and Corinth, Greece,' in *Health in Antiquity* (ed. Helen King; New York: Routledge, 2005), 59–82.
- 2 Fox states that the amount of human remains in Corinth dating to the Roman and Late Roman periods 'comprises one of the largest known collections in Greece': Fox, 'Health in Hellenistic and Roman Times,' 62.
- 3 Fox, 'Health in Hellenistic and Roman Times,' 60.
- 4 Fox, 'Health in Hellenistic and Roman Times,' 78.
- 5 The feeding bottles are located in the collection as Corinth Objects: C 1936 828, CP 309, Z 351, Z 277, and CP 122. Some date to the late Helladic IIIb and late Helladic III periods, while the others are undated.
- 6 There are over 125 terracotta dolls or pieces of dolls found at Corinth. These can be searched under 'dolls' at the Corinthian excavation website: <http://corinth.ascsa.net/research?v=list&q=&sort=&t=object>.
- 7 Corinth Object: MF 2005 45.
- 8 Agora Museum, Athens. <http://ancient-greece.org/museum/agora.html>.
- 9 Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens. www.cycladic.gr/en.
- 10 Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens. www.cycladic.gr/en.
- 11 Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki. www.mbp.gr/en/home.
- 12 Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki. www.mbp.gr/en/home.
- 13 Margaret Y. MacDonald and Leif E. Vaage, 'Unclean but Holy Children: Paul's Everyday Quandary in 1 Corinthians 7:14c,' *CBQ* 73 (2011), writes that

there are good reasons to suspect that even the most determined celibate could not help but be affected by the social reality of children, for their presence in the Roman world was ubiquitous. This is true whether we are talking about a *domus* with a large retinue of slaves and clients or much simpler spaces and smaller household groups. The openness of architectural plans and the general lack of privacy are important factors to consider. Reacting to the tendency to associate the Corinthian house churches with the more elaborate setting of the Roman villa, David G. Horrell has recently identified simple two-room dwellings as a possible locus for Corinthian church meetings. If Horrell is correct, then the presence of children of all ages would simply have been unavoidable; the world of nursing babies, demanding toddlers, and distracted boys and girls would inevitably have intruded into Paul's apostolic domain, no matter how much he might have wished to be free of such distractions.

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- 14 Such a method on the presence of children within Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles is at the heart of Margaret Y. MacDonald's book, *The Power of Children: The Construction of Christian Families in the Greco-Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015). See also Cornelia Horn and John W. Martens, 'Let the Little Children Come to Me': *Children and Childhood in Early Christianity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2009), x–xii, 1–40.
- 15 As I argue in my forthcoming article 'Fathers and Daughters in 1 Corinthians 7:36–38: The Social Implications of Marriage in Early Christian Families,' in

- T&T Clark Handbook on Children* (ed. Sharon Betsworth and Julie Faith Parker; London: T&T Clark, forthcoming). See also MacDonald and Vaage, 'Unclean but Holy Children,' 540.
- 16 Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Our Mother St. Paul* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 3.
 - 17 Horn and Martens, 'Let the Little Children Come to Me', 33–34.
 - 18 I acknowledge that the use of both 'Christian' and 'Jewish' is fraught in this context, but I use them due to the fact that it is possible that by virtue of birth in a Jewish context boys might still have been circumcised by their parents, who were followers of Christ. Matthew Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 101, has argued that 'Paul did not reject the rite of circumcision or the law in general. He rejected their application to Gentiles.' How long this could have taken place among children in communities that sought to create an ongoing sense of unity in Christ is another matter of consideration, even if we accept the premise that Paul wanted Jews to remain Jews. For Thiessen's claim that Paul did not think Gentiles should (or could) be incorporated into the covenant by circumcision, see his earlier work, *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
 - 19 Children are not often considered directly in discussions of ethnicity, hybridity, self-definition, and identity in early Christian communities, but such questions bear directly on how children belong, to what they belong, and how they become members. See Joseph A. Marchal, 'Mimicry and Colonial Differences: Gender, Ethnicity, and Empire in the Interpretation of Pauline Imitation,' in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies* (ed. Laura Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 110–111, 116; Cynthia M. Baker, '"From Every Nation under Heaven": Jewish Ethnicities in the Greco-Roman World,' in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings*, 79–99; Denise Kimber Buell, 'God's Own People: Specters of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in Early Christian Studies,' in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings*, 159–190; *idem*, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). David G. Horrell, 'Ethnicisation, Marriage and Early Christian Identity: Critical Reflections on 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Peter 3 and Modern New Testament Scholarship', *NTS* 62 (2016): 439–460.
 - 20 Susan Elliott, *Cutting Too Close for Comfort: Paul's Letter to the Galatians in its Anatolian Cultic Context* (London: T&T Clark, 2003).
 - 21 Elliott, *Cutting Too Close for Comfort*, 180–195, 221–229. See, however, all of chapters 1–6. The whole of the discussion is essential for understanding Elliott's argument. Mark Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002) also notes that the presence of the *galli*, ubiquitous in Anatolia, are evoked especially by Galatians 5:12 (204).
 - 22 Elliott, *Cutting Too Close for Comfort*, 264–265, 274.
 - 23 Elliott, *Cutting Too Close for Comfort*, 180–185; Mark Golden, 'Pais, "child" and "slave",' *L'antiquité Classique* 54 (1985): 91–104.
 - 24 Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem*, 91 reads circumcision in this passage (and throughout Paul's letters) as problematic for Gentiles entirely, which he sees as the root of Paul's argument. Particularly in Gal 4:21–31 he claims that Paul is comparing Gentile circumcision to Ishmael's improper circumcision (91–92).

- 25 Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness*, 156, notes that there is no ritual of conversion for a Gentile woman prior to the second century CE. The act of marriage was itself the process of bringing a Gentile woman into the Jewish community. In the second to third centuries CE, immersion rituals begin to emerge, which Cohen sees particularly linked to proselyte women entering the Jewish community (199–223).
- 26 Joshua Garroway, 'Engendering Judaism: Paul, Baptism, and Circumcision,' in *Paul the Jew: Rereading the Apostle as a Figure of Second Temple Judaism* (ed. Gabriele Boccaccini and Carlos A. Segovia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 219–243.
- 27 Bruce Hansen, 'All of You Are One': *The Social Vision of Galatians 3.28, 1 Corinthians 12.13 and Colossians 3.11* (LNTS 409; London: T&T Clark, 2010).
- 28 Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem*, 111–115, has a robust discussion of baptism as the means by which Gentiles share in the *pneuma* of Christ and are brought into the body of Christ, but there is no comparable discussion of the baptism of Jews, or the baptism of Gentile or Jewish children, by which all members of the body of Christ would share a belonging that transcended their ethnic separateness. There is, that is, no wrestling with what belonging to Christ means practically for families and children in the Church.
- 29 Mark D. Nanos, 'The Question of Conceptualization: Qualifying Paul's Position on Circumcision in Dialogue with Josephus's Advisors to King Izates,' in *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* (ed. Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 105–152.
- 30 Nanos, 'The Question of Conceptualization,' 108. In this case, Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem*, 101, and elsewhere, it seems, would see Paul as arguing against circumcision for Gentile boys.
- 31 Nanos, 'The Question of Conceptualization,' 107–108.
- 32 Nanos, 'The Question of Conceptualization,' 126–127.
- 33 Nanos, 'The Question of Conceptualization,' 107–108. My italics.
- 34 Garroway, 'Engendering Judaism,' 219–243.
- 35 Garroway, 'Engendering Judaism,' 220. Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness*, 158.
- 36 Garroway, 'Engendering Judaism,' 220. Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness*, 156.
- 37 Garroway, 'Engendering Judaism,' 221–222. See Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness*, 26.
- 38 Garroway, 'Engendering Judaism,' 236.
- 39 Garroway, 'Engendering Judaism,' 236–237. Troy W. Martin, 'The Covenant of Circumcision (Genesis 17:9–14) and the Situational Antitheses in Galatians 3:28,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122/1 (Spring, 2003): 111–125.
- 40 Garroway, 'Engendering Judaism,' 237.
- 41 Garroway, 'Engendering Judaism,' 232, states that Paul might have initially in his Gentile mission approved of circumcision for converts 'before he opposed it.' See also Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness*, 26, 365, 370.
- 42 Caroline Johnson Hodge, 'The Question of Identity: Gentiles as Gentiles – But also Not – in Pauline Communities,' in *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, 153–173, here 166–167. She also states that the Gentiles are neither Jewish nor precisely Gentile: Paul is not asking for an ethnic transformation from non-Jew to Jew. Instead, he argues that gentiles adopt Jewish attributes but remain gentiles; 'the gentiles do not become Jews ... the gentiles are the ones for who this implies a hybrid ethnic identity' (172). In addition, she says, 'It is striking that with all of Paul's talk of transformation and being made new (e.g., in 2 Cor. 5:17 and Gal. 6:15), he does not clearly define what gentiles have become' (172). Yes and no. Everyone is a hybrid, more or less Jewish let us say in

Paul's churches, but the notion of 'new creation' does not in fact demand further definition if those within the community accept this definition as sufficient.

43 Buell, 'Race and Universalism,' 467; *Why This New Race*, 9. Marchal, 'Mimicry and Colonial Differences,' 117–118.

44 Horrell, 'Ethnicisation,' 439–442.

45 Horrell, 'Ethnicisation,' states

In a ground-breaking and influential study, Denise Kimber Buell explores the deployment of what she calls "ethnic reasoning" in early Christian texts from the second and third centuries. For Buell, the rhetorical deployment of ethnic terminology – both to incorporate and to exclude – emerges as a strong and significant feature of early Christian discourse.

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I would suggest that such discourse starts already here with Paul, as Marchal, 'Mimicry and Colonial Differences,' 101, 110–111, 116.

46 Horrell, 'Ethnicisation,' writes that

particularly relevant to the study of earliest Christianity is their observation that, despite the prominence of notions of ancestry and shared history, ethnic groups can be newly made, in what Cornell and Hartman call "ethnicisation". This, they explain, is the making of an ethnic group. It is the process by which a group of persons comes to see itself as a distinct group linked by bonds of kinship or their equivalents, by a shared history, and by cultural symbols that represent ... the "epitome" of their peoplehood. It is a coming to consciousness of particular kinds of bonds: the making of a people.

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47 Anders Klostergaard Petersen, 'Paul the Jew Was Also Paul the Hellenist,' in *Paul the Jew: Rereading the Apostle as a Figure of Second Temple Judaism* (ed. Gabriele Boccaccini and Carlos A. Segovia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 278–279.

48 Horrell, and others

49 Johnson Hodge, 'The Question of Identity,' 154.

50 Petersen, 'Paul the Jew Was Also Paul the Hellenist,' 278.

51 Petersen, 'Paul the Jew Was Also Paul the Hellenist,' 282.

52 Petersen, 'Paul the Jew Was Also Paul the Hellenist,' 273–299.

53 MacDonald and Vaage, 'Unclean but Holy Children,' 537, write that 'the Greek term for children here (τέκνα) can mean both adult and young children, though most commentators have taken the text to refer to young children still living with their parents.' While it is difficult to specify the age range of the children, the passage only makes sense if the children are still living with their parents.

54 'Paul's surprising counsel on mixed marriage actually did challenge the limits of contemporary cultural assumptions regarding marriage among both Jews and gentiles, where the husband as the head of the household was supposed to determine its religion': MacDonald and Vaage, 'Unclean but Holy Children,' 534.

55 Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness*, 272.

56 Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness*, 5.

57 Horrell, 'Ethnicisation,' 450–451.

58 Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, 'Works without Faith in 1 Cor., VII, 14,' *RB* 84 (1977): 349–361, here 356.

59 Murphy-O'Connor, 'Works without Faith in 1 Cor., VII, 14,' 351, 361.

60 Yonder Moynihan Gillihan, 'Jewish Laws on Illicit Marriage, the Defilement of Offspring, and the Holiness of the Temple: A New Halakic Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:14,' *JBL* 121 (2002): 711–744, here 729 and 715–716.

- 61 MacDonald and Vaage, 'Unclean but Holy Children,' 533.
- 62 Leif E. Vaage, 'The Translation of 1 Cor 7:14c and the Labile Social Body of the Pauline Church,' *RB* 116 (2009): 557–571; MacDonald and Vaage, 'Unclean but Holy Children,' 526–546, argue that Paul presents two contradictory statements as fact, that the children are both unclean, due to the unbelieving parent, and holy, due to the believing parent. I follow Jan Lambrecht, 'What Kind of Logic Is There in 1 Corinthians 7,14cd?' *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 88.1 (April 2012): 173–178, who states that

no earlier than in v. 14d Paul emphasizes the concrete reality: "but now your children are holy." Moreover, v. 14d grounds what Paul has claimed in v. 14ab: the sanctification of the nonbelieving spouse by the believing one is confirmed by v. 14d. Since the children are de facto holy, one may safely accept that in a mixed marriage – in which the partners stay peacefully together – the nonbelieving spouse is also sanctified!

(176)
- 63 Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 153.
- 64 Johnson Hodge, 'The Question of Identity,' 159. Hodge goes on to connect this notion of purity to Paul's conception of baptism which as a rite of initiation and 'kinship-making' transforms them from 'being *those* gentiles into being *these* gentiles.'
- 65 Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, 153.
- 66 Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, 215.
- 67 Whether Acts of the Apostles always offers us historically sound readings of the ancient Christian Church, there would seem to be no reason on the face of it to concoct this situation in Acts 16:1. Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness*, 363–377, in a long appendix, discusses Acts 16:1–3 and whether Timothy would have been considered a Gentile or a Jew when being circumcised. Cohen believes that Timothy was considered a Gentile, which means that his circumcision was probably a done for missionary not theological reasons.
- 68 Ben F. Meyer, *The Early Christians: Their World Mission & Self-Discovery* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1986), 55, 57, 64, 65. See Gillihan, 'Jewish Laws on Illicit Marriage,' 729.
- 69 Meyer, *The Early Christians*, 51–65.
- 70 Hodge, 'The Question of Identity,' 165.
- 71 Meyer, *The Early Christians*, 122–123, 144–146.
- 72 Meyer, *The Early Christians*, 133.
- 73 Meyer, *The Early Christians*, 173.
- 74 Mark Nanos, speaking particularly of the Galatians, says that 'the Gentile addresses appear to be outgrouped quasi-insiders, seeking the dominant in-group's full acceptance' (Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians*, 98). In 1 Cor 7:14 Paul seems to be offering the 'outgrouped quasi-insiders' in-group status and full acceptance.
- 75 Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Studies in Biblical Theology 1; London: SCM Press, 1964).
- 76 Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 43–44.
- 77 Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 61.
- 78 Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 59–61.
- 79 Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 64–65.
- 80 Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology* (trans. M. Eugene Boring; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 211.

7 ‘Stay away from my children!’

Educators and the accusation of sexual abuse in Roman Antiquity

Christian Laes

To a lover of boys he remarked: ‘Just as schoolmasters lose their common sense by spending all their time with boys, so it is with people like you.’

(Diogenes Laërtius, *Vitae Philosophorum* 7.18 [Zeno])

Gelehrtenspott (‘Mocking of scholars’) is one of the recurring themes of a recent book/volume on the image of sophists in Hellenistic and Roman Antiquity.¹ Apparently, the ancient writers had a full range of arguments and stock phrases at their disposal to deride those in the teaching profession, involving accusations such as: greed and avarice, clumsiness, otherworldliness and absentmindedness, pedantic showing off of useless erudition, austerity and grimness towards pupils, cruelty, and poverty due to small fees. Most of these stock features can be traced down until at least the Erasmian tradition of the *Laus Stultitiae*.² One feature, however, is strikingly absent in this volume, though it has an equally long tradition and turns up in a surprisingly varied way of contexts: the accusation of sexual indiscretion of pupils by their teachers. Although Erasmus refrained from using the topos, pederasty and teachers was another favorite theme in Renaissance writings on sex, vice, and love.³

In the present day, such incidents (or even the mere suggestion of them) are enough to shock parents, children, the working community, and the general public. More than one school has come close to being shut down when rumors started. The mere mention of pedophilia is enough to turn the male teacher or educator—accusations towards females are extremely rare—into a monster. A cunning creature carefully hiding his wicked intentions, only to all of a sudden strike the most vulnerable victims among his pupils.⁴ Well into the twentieth century, teachers who appeared before the courts for similar allegations were accused of the unspeakable (and therefore unnamed) vice of sodomy. Societal changes in the last thirty years have made the general public more and more sensible to the eminent danger of pedophilia in educational contexts. However, also our present-day understanding and use of the term pedophilia is notoriously vague and far from clear-cut. Often, the media tend to conflate the legal definition (with minimum age for sexual maturity), the psychiatric meaning of the term (pointing to sexual urges of adults towards

prepubescent children), and a sort of vague category that equates pedophiles to monsters, sociopaths, and all sorts of evildoers.⁵

In this chapter, I deal with sexual relations between instructors and their pupils in Roman Antiquity by studying three different dossiers. First, I study schools, which were sometimes viewed by the ancient writers as places of sexual tension. After this, I offer an extensive list of cases, carefully taking into account the different sorts of educators and teachers mentioned. In this, Greek resonances and influences appear to be of great importance.⁶ A following section deals with the *Milesian Tale* on the Pergamene Youth, a remarkable story in Petronius's *Satyrica*, which crystalises, as it were, Greek and Roman views on the issue. In the concluding section, I point to the importance of the father figure, the ambiguous status of educators, and to intimate friendships—three factors which are indispensable to take into account if one would like to approach the topic in a historically appropriate way. However, before embarking on the subject, the context of Roman schools and ancient sexuality needs to be sketched.

Roman schools and Roman views of sexuality

For many reasons, straightforward comparisons between the school system in the present-day West and Roman Antiquity are inappropriate.⁷ There were no state-organised schools or controlled institutions the way we have them today. Admittedly, some cities proudly advertised their offering of schools and educators. Even in such cases, this pertained only at a small minority of the total amount of children, and the parents were still expected to pay their share. Mostly, a single individual could just decide to start offering lectures. Parents of more modest means sent their sons and daughters for basic instruction to such a schoolmaster or *ludimagister*, whose methods of teaching, environment, and accommodation came close to that of street teachers as we know them in developing countries nowadays. Only sons of the more well-to-do continued with lectures in Latin and Greek grammar and literary authors by the *grammaticus*. Despite the airs of prestige and erudition, these were private individuals who were often content that the parents were willing to pay the fee at the end of the month. Even the so-called 'higher' education with the rhetorician consisted of not much more than attending and paying for the courses of one particular professor, who sometimes happened to teach in a city where many of his sort had gathered (in which cases the anachronistic term 'university town' has been used). For wealthy parents, their children's education was more of a private matter. Instead of sending their children to the crowded classes of schoolmasters with bad reputation, they preferred to have their offspring instructed in basic reading, writing, and calculation by a private instructor. An attendant or *paedagogus* could take up such tasks, or he could be a kind of moral supervisor, accompanying the children when they went out in the streets, or the boys when they attended the classes of the grammarian or the rhetorician.

For daughters of the well-to-do, the entire 'higher education' took place by means of private instruction in the safety of the parental house.

One has to wait until the year 425 CE for the establishment of an institution that somehow resembles a state-sponsored university, in Constantinople. The lack of state intervention not only meant an absence of control, it also implied the non-existence of any degrees or certificates. Those who wished to be considered teachers and started a business of their own, *were* just teachers—it was as simple as that. Therefore, the terminology used to name instructors was somewhat blurred, as we also need to take into account that no strict age categories were applied to allow students to move up to higher levels of educations (also, the system of different grades was non-existent).

There has been wide agreement among classical scholars to consider Greco-Roman pagan sexuality as a whole, stretching roughly from the Athenian classical era in the fifth century BCE to the fall of Roman pagan civilisation and the rise of Christianity in the fourth and fifth centuries CE.⁸ The overall image that emerges is that ancient sexuality was basically perceived as a social phenomenon. Sexual acts were rather acts of domination: taking the active role was the expected appropriate sexual behavior for men, while being passive was a sign of unmanliness. No single Greek or Roman would label a person as 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual.' What people did in bed was by no means psychologically tagged as proof of a lifelong disposition. Hence sexuality was often mentioned as a peripheral fact, connected to dietics, eating, drinking, and corporal needs. Androcentric, penetrative, phallic, and macho are terms that aptly describe ancient attitudes towards sexuality. This has, of course, to do with the fact that most of our sources are exclusively male. Recently, scholars have questioned this androcentric approach and stress on buggery and penetration. Some studies have rightly pointed to female biological attraction and charm as a historical fact, to the passive experiencing of sex, and to the ideal of harmony and sexual enjoyment in marriage. As such, also widely accepted views on asymmetry, dominance, and age difference in ancient homosexual relations have sometimes been questioned.

Of course, ancient non-Christian sexuality should not be considered as a monolithic bloc. One of the main differences between classical Greek and Roman attitudes concerns the issue of pederasty. The Athenians accepted the fact that a freeborn and aristocratic youth was sexually involved with an adult male, on the condition that the younger man took on the passive role and never indulged in the sexual pleasures of the relationship. It was believed that, thanks to this relationship, the youngster could learn a great deal of social skills that would enable him to become a full-grown male aristocratic leader. Romans, however, radically excluded the possibility of sexual submission of freeborn boys in possession of Roman citizenship. They disregarded sexual relationships with free boys as a typical Greek way of life, and only accepted pederastic affairs with slave boys or non-citizens. 'Love whoever you want, as long as you abstain from married women, widows, virgins, youth and freeborn boys' (Plautus, *Curculio*, 37–38). This resulted in severe legislation stressing

the importance of sexual purity of those endowed with Roman citizenship; although it remains an open question whether these laws were actually put into practice, and whether ordinary people bothered about the actual legal status (citizen or foreigner) of their sexual partner. In any case, we do not hear of a ‘sexual revolution’ when, after the *Constitutio Antoniniana* in the year 212, all free citizens of the Roman Empire were granted citizenship.

Sex in the classroom

While educators and moralists throughout the ages have been worried about sexual tensions and sexual games that arise when teenagers are put together, the ancient writers only occasionally, and surely not emphatically, mention the matter.

Though the archeological context is uncertain, some have suggested that three Pompejan graffiti with explicit language—*cinaedus* (‘catamite’), *vetus cinaedus* (‘old catamite’), and *fellator* (‘sucker’)—might belong to a school context.⁹ In his *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian is keen on presenting the ideal education to become an orator. His audience is exclusively aristocratic. To Quintilian, young boys (*pueros*) should not be instructed together with young men (*adulescentibus*). Although he admits that a good teacher is able to keep his youthful pupils under control, he nonetheless advises to keep the weaker members separate from the more mature, and to avoid not only the actual charge of moral corruption but also the mere suspicion of it. He proceeds by saying that a teacher should keep away both himself and his school from ‘the ultimate vices’ (*ab ultimis vitiis*).¹⁰ It is hard not to understand such observations as warnings against moral corruption by sexual vices.

Via a tongue-in-cheek statement, Juvenal refers to quite the same sexual play in his *Satire* on the unpleasant effects of patronage intellectuals have to suffer from. One of the professions explicitly mentioned is the *grammaticus* (v. 217) on whom the parents put high demands:

You’ ll demand he forms tender characters under his thumb,
As if he were moulding faces from wax; you’ ll demand he acts
Like a father to that crowd, forbids them to play dubious games,
Or mutually indulge. It’s no light thing to keep watch on all
Those boys, with their hands and eyes quivering in the end.
‘That’s your job,’ the parents say, yet come the turn of the year
You’ ll get, in gold, what the crowd grants for one gladiatorial win.
(Juvenal, *Satire* 7.237–7.243, trans. A.S. Kline; with adaptations)¹¹

While ‘dubious games’ and ‘mutually indulging’ clearly refer to masturbation in the classroom, the quivering hands and eyes are also full of sexual innuendos. In the philosophical tradition, quivering eyes were the signs of sexual exhaustion.¹²

True, we are far away from the ‘masturbation mania’ that manifested itself from the sixteenth century onwards in Western thought, resulting in condemnation for moral and religious reasons. Such condemnations were completely unknown to the ancient world before Christianity, which did not care too much about the early sexual experiments of teenagers.¹³ What mattered to Quintilian was the inequality and the possibility that older boys (let alone the teacher) should take away the good fame and reputation of aristocratic younger boys. In Juvenal’s satirised world, the preventing of sexual play is just one of the many tasks entrusted to the grammarian—in the end, parents seem to be more concerned about not paying too much cash to the poor grammarian.

Accusations against educators

In compiling a list of attested cases of sexual abuse by educators, one should immediately refrain from two reactions inspired by the possibilities of sociological research in the present day. For Roman Antiquity, it is obviously impossible to make any statistical claims about sexual abuse by educators, let alone elaborate on the occurrence of the phenomenon. Also, one must resist the temptation of drawing a chronological list of the exact ages of pupils involved because both age terminology and the vocabulary to denote educators are somehow vague.

As will be clear in the following part of this essay, much of the evidence has precedents in the classical Greek period. A particular instance is Aeschines’s speech *Against Timarchus* (fourth century BCE). The text was surely familiar to speech writers in Roman times, and the institutions and instructors described still existed in the Greek cities of the Roman Empire. Aeschines mentions specific Athenian regulations on the orderly conduct of boys and surely on those in charge of young people: school teachers (*didaskaloi*), gymnastic teachers (*paidotribai*), slave-attendants (*paidagogoi*), leaders of choirs (*choregoi*—they needed to be over forty years of age), and rhetors. As solitary contact and darkness are considered very much suspect, the lawgiver is said to forbid to open schools and wrestling-schools before the sun has risen, and commands to close them before sunset. Even entering the schools when the boys were present was not allowed to anyone older than them, unless he was a son of the teacher, a brother, or a sister’s husband.

However, one should be extremely cautious with this source. The laws cited in Aeschines’s text are generally considered spurious additions. Moreover, the regulations are not attested elsewhere for classical Athens; they may have been Solonian laws, passed later, or even bold inventions by Aeschines himself, who was especially keen on incriminating Timarchus as utterly ineligible to start a career in active politics, as he had engaged in improper homosexual relationships during his youth.¹⁴

Evidence ranked according to the type of educator

Some passages in Quintilian almost tacitly refer to the dangers of pederasty or abuse by educators on a general level, not specifying a particular sort of teacher. Quintilian mentions the potential risks of the right to corporal punishment, or the perils of being taught by just one teacher, instead of facing the public forum of a class group.¹⁵ To this, one may add passages on the required *sanctitas* of the instructor in the case of younger boys and the need of severity in the case of older pupils; or the remark that also a private teacher can be of bad manners (*turpis*).¹⁶ In such passages, sexual abuse may be at the background, together with other moral vices—but it is not mentioned explicitly.

Since attendants or *paedagogi* were to spend a considerable amount of time with their pupils, they took a large part of moral education on their shoulders. Therefore, the ancient authors insist that the man chosen to become a *paedagogus* would be a person of good morals or a reliable freedman.¹⁷ Having a beautiful young son was a danger, since he could be subjected to homosexual overtures while walking on the streets;¹⁸ or he could, of course, himself go out hunting for nice girls. ‘Besides other gifts of nature and fortune, our young man (*adulescenti*) is blessed with a formidable corporal beauty. In this slippery age, we should not only search for a teacher, but also for a guardian and a guide.’¹⁹ What we read here is very much the same concern for the honor of a beautiful unmarried daughter chased by suitors, a common feature for honorable societies. As we will see, some cunning pederasts took advantage of the careful guardian role in order to satisfy their lust—at least in Petronius’s satirical world. Actual instances of *paedagogi* crossing the limits of decent sexual behavior towards their pupils do not appear in the records.

Also for schoolmasters, the dossier is meagre and the evidence somewhat spurious. Once again, we are referred to the context of humor and satire. An epigram by Straton refers to a young man named Dionysius whose voice is changing from a shrill soprano to a gruff bass. He is explicitly said to teach a boy (*paida*) the basic skill of reading. The poem has a sexual innuendo, in which active and passive refer to both grammatical categories and sexual poses.²⁰

In the satirical tradition, Hamillus was possibly a stock character of the pederastic schoolteacher. According to Juvenal, it is utterly difficult to enumerate all the illnesses that afflict an old man—listing all the pupils who have been ‘inclined’ by Hamillus would prove to be as hard as to name all the incommunities of old age. Since the pun is a basic exercise of grammatical declination, Hamillus might have been a schoolmaster, though it is also possible that he was a grammarian.²¹ Martial mentions a certain Hamillus who was keen on being caught in the sexual act with *grandes*. Again, we may understand that Hamillus was supposed to be a teacher, and we may interpret that he wanted to be seen with ‘big boys’ in order to avoid the suspicion of having sex with smaller kids. However, such interpretation rests on two premises: that Hamillus was indeed a stock character for a teacher (Martial

does not explicitly say so), and that the epigram does not rather refer to his secret preference for passive sex and being penetrated (*pedicari*). In the latter interpretation, the epigram does not even treat the subject of sex with younger boys; note also that Martial describes his Hamillus as surrounded by *liberti*, slaves and clients. This makes it difficult to regard him as a schoolteacher, though he could still be a grammarian.²²

Other evidence, however, points in the same direction of sexual allegations against schoolteachers who make sexual advances toward boys. A fragment by the Hellenistic poet Callimachus warns a schoolteacher to no longer sexually harass his pupils.²³ A remarkable and rather lengthy epitaph is directed to the schoolmaster Furius Philocalus, who originated from the town of Aurunca. It states emphatically that he treated his pupils respectfully

Furius Philocalus was his name and he hailed from Aurunca.
 He was a schoolmaster.
 He respected his pupils greatly,
 And he was also a reliable writer of wills.
 He never denied anyone anything, nor did he ever hurt people.
 He faithfully completed his life course without fear.
 Now here lie scattered his bones.
 They were placed here by the members of the *centuriae*.

Though *summa castitas* undoubtedly entailed other aspects (for instance, not beating children), I find it hard not to understand this as an implicit refutation of allegations of sexual abuse).²⁴

The case of Caecilius Epirota brings us to the level of the *grammaticus*. As a grammarian, he was privately instructing Attica, daughter of Atticus, while she was married to the later Emperor Augustus's right-hand person, Marcus Agrippa. Although married, she was still an early teenager; in fact she became a mother at age fifteen in the year 36 BCE. When suspicion of a relationship between the instructor and his young female pupil arouse, Epirota sought refuge with the poet and politician Cornelius Gallus. Octavian took this as a serious offence. Gallus eventually fell in disgrace and was sentenced. After Gallus's suicide in 26 BCE, Caecilius Epirota went on to form his own school, in which he only accepted few students, and preferably only older boys (*paucis et tantum adolescentibus*) after the donning of the *toga virilis*, except for some cases when he could not refuse certain parents the acceptance of younger students.²⁵

The sexual reputation of some grammarians was also a subject for humor, but again there is little explicit evidence on sexual preferences for pupils. Remius Palaemon was a notorious and infamous womaniser, and the remark that his vices and moral corruption made him utterly unfit to entrust him with either boys or young men refers to his debauched way of life, but not to sexual advances toward his young audience.²⁶ Likewise, an epigram makes fun of the grammarian Menander, who taught Zenonis' son; the mother actually was his

client at night, when all sorts of ‘declinations’ were taught²⁷—again, there is no reference to sexual advances towards pupils.

In a similar way, the Greek trainer of boys (*paidotribès*), while it does not belong to the list of Roman teachers, was obviously still present in many cities belonging to the Greek East of the Roman Empire. In the heyday of the Empire, such trainers were the subject of satire by Straton of Sardis (second century CE), whose ‘pederastic muse’ made it into the late ancient collection of the *Anthologia Palatina*. One trainer is caught in an embarrassing pose with a hairless lad (*leion paidarion*); another trainer does not know his job well and does not teach proper corporal exercises. The *paidotribès* Demetrius, who during a banquet is in the company of four boys, is said to be the most happy man in the whole world. His guest suggests that he also train the kids at night.²⁸

Lucian and the Greek dossier

Epigrams from the second century CE and the topic of Greek education bring us to the Greek author Lucian of Samosata. His writings are undoubtedly a rich source for the present topic, though we should immediately point out that this evidence belongs to a very specific tradition. Firmly belonging to the Atticising mode of the Second Sophistic Movement, Lucian’s work is drenched in the tradition of the Athenian Golden Age, since it is from the fifth and the fourth centuries BCE. His writings are therefore full of learned allusions to classical mythology and philosophy, but problematic to directly use for the social history of his own time, namely the second century CE.²⁹

In his *Dialogues of the Courtisans*, we read about the young and attractive prostitute Drose who was in love with the young lad (*meirakion*) Clinias. Unfortunately, the boy had a new instructor, named Aristaenetus, who forbade him to further see Drose. Aristaenetus is called *didaskalos* and *philosophon*, making it clear that Clinias was in his later teens. In fact, Aristaenetus turned out to be the archetypical sneaking pederast. He liked to read ancient Platonic discourses on love and virtue and employed his ‘research topics’ to entrap youth. To him, science was just a pretext for satisfying his own lusts. In a message, Dromo threatened to reveal the matter to Clinias’s father, who was apparently not aware of what was actually going on.³⁰

A more indirect statement is found in Lucian’s *Eunuchus*, but the allusions to pederasty are clear. Lucian describes a philosophical contest with big prices for the teaching of boys (*neoi*). Here, a certain Bagoas (the name is an allusion to the eunuch beloved by Alexander the Great) ventured to add the observation that a eunuch was a far more suitable teacher for the young, since he could not incur any blame and would not face that ‘typical charge against Socrates’ of leading the youngsters astray.³¹ As Bagoas had been ridiculed for his beardlessness, he despatched this shaft to good effect: ‘If it is by length of beard that philosophers are to be judged, a he-goat would with greater justice be given preference to all of them!’ At this moment, a third person who

was present objected. Bagoas was far from being a eunuch, since he was once caught in the act of adultery. Despite his smoothness of jowl and effeminate voice, he was actually very masculine, as would be clear when he would be stripped! At this reaction, Bagoas blushes and does not exactly know what to do. On the one hand, he did not think it seemly to plead guilty to the charge of adultery; yet, this accusation would not be without its usefulness for the case when in progress. It would at least prove he was fond of women, so it could be understood that boys were safe with him.³²

Similar allusions are found in Lucian's *Feast of the Lapithae*, also entitled the *Symposium*. The work is a highly humorous parody of Plato's *Symposium*, since this banquet ends in drunken violence. The Stoic philosopher Hetoemocles is not invited by Aristaenetus. He sends a letter to be read aloud during the feast, in which he reproaches Aristaenetus *inter alia* that he has his son Zeno taught by a certain Diphilus, a fellow Stoic philosopher who has already taken away two other pupils from him. Hetoemocles suggestively adds that the lad (*meirakion*) fancies his teacher, and would offer further details, but notes a wedding banquet is not a time for unpleasantness or offences. But it is mentioned that the boy's attendant (*paidagogos*) Zopyrus might tell more about this.³³ All this should be understood in the context of a notorious quarrel on Stoic sexual practice. In fact, contemporaries were outraged at the Stoic claim that sexual contact was acceptable with boys up to the age of twenty-eight. Pseudo-Lucian mentions the age of twenty as an upper threshold.³⁴ Another suggestion of the philosophers' sexual debauchery is found in the same *Symposium*. It provides a hint of the age categories one might think about in this context. The philosopher Cleodemus is caught in adultery with his pupil Sosastrus's wife—so we might imagine Sosastrus as a married man at least being in his early twenties.³⁵

The most vivid account on the matter—no doubt also the most pertinent to the present chapter—is Lucian's exposure to the fraudulent prophet, his contemporary, Alexander of Abonoteichus. Unlike the above examples, this fragment entails more than a set of allusions to Platonic or Stoic philosophers' practice. The reader is introduced to the false prophet himself while he is still a boy (*meirakion*), a charlatan who very much fancies his physical beauty. Here the text viciously suggests that Alexander is trafficked freely in his attractiveness, and that he sells his company to whoever seeks it. Regarding his master, there is room for little doubt: 'This teacher and admirer of his was a man of Tyana by birth, one of those who had been followers of the notorious Apollonius, and who knew his whole bag of tricks. You see what sort of school the man that I am describing comes from' (with an obvious allusion to Apollonius of Tyana, another famous prophet of the second century CE). We also learn that this apprenticeship takes place before Alexander actually develops a full beard (early twenties?).³⁶ By that time, his master is dead.³⁷ Obviously, the ancients had no concept of youthful trauma or the psychological impacts of early youth experiences, but some of it resonates in the following passages on Alexander's own adult behavior:

Although he cautioned all to abstain from intercourse with boys on the ground that it was impious, for his own part this pattern of propriety made a clever arrangement. He commanded the cities in Pontus and Paphlagonia to send choir-boys for three years' service, to sing hymns to the god in his household; they were required to examine, select, and send the noblest, youngest, and most handsome. These he kept under ward and treated like bought slaves, sleeping with them and affronting them in every way. He made it a rule, too, not to greet anyone over eighteen years with his lips, or to embrace and kiss him; he kissed only the young, extending his hand to the others to be kissed by them. They were called 'those within the kiss.'

He duped the simpletons in this way from first to last, ruining women right and left as well as living with favourites. Indeed, it was a great thing that everyone coveted if he simply cast his eyes upon a man's wife; if, however, he deemed her worthy of a kiss, each husband thought that good fortune would flood his house. Many women even boasted that they had had children by Alexander, and their husbands bore witness that they spoke the truth!

(Lucian, *Alex* 41–42, trans. A.M. Harmon)

The link with pederasty and sophists of the Second Sophistic Movement is clearly not confined to the works of Lucian. There might also be an echo in Philostratus's description of the sophist Hadrian of Tyre consorting with his pupils 'at play, over wine, in the hunt ... and by accompanying them to Greek festivals, so that they were disposed to him as children to a sweet and gentle father, one who joined them in maintaining Greek frivolity.'³⁸ In an extant speech, the rhetor Aristides also attacks sophists for their devotion to worldly pleasures such as pederasty (*paidika*).³⁹

Such jokes are surely not confined to Greek literature. The Roman satirist Juvenal comments on the propensity of philosophers towards pederasty. One should never trust a severe outward appearance—some look like austere thinkers, but they are in fact nothing more than Socratic debauched persons.⁴⁰

The Pergamene youth: literary evidence and social history

It is only with the specific context of pederasty and Greek philosophers in mind that the reader can understand some of the humor that lurks in the *Milesian Tale* on the boy from Pergamum, a most infamous passage in what has been called one of the most remarkable works of Latin literature, Petronius's *Satyrica*. The story has a Roman setting. Eumolpus is in the *cohors* of a quaestor and receives a stipendium for that task, but he wants to enhance his income and sex life by becoming a teacher.

'When I went to Asia,' he began, 'as a paid officer in the Quaestor's suite, I lodged with a family at Pergamus. I found my quarters very pleasant, first

on account of the convenience and elegance of the apartments, and still more so because of the beauty of my host's son. I devised the following method to prevent the master of the house entertaining any suspicions of me as a seducer. Whenever the conversation at table turned on the abuse of handsome boys, I showed such extreme indignation and protested with such an air of austerity and offended dignity against the violence done to my ears by filthy talk of the sort, that I came to be regarded, especially by the mother, as one of the greatest of moralists and philosophers. Before long I was allowed to take the lad (*ephebum*) to the gymnasium; it was I that directed his studies, I that guided his conduct, and guarded against any possible debaucher of his person being admitted to the house.'

(Petronius, *Sat* 85, trans. A.R. Allinson)

Late in the evening, in the dinner room the boy is starting to fall asleep. Within the boy's hearing, Eumolpus prays to Venus that he be allowed to kiss him, provided he is asleep and does not realise what is happening. Immediately, the boy starts snoring and pretends to be asleep, while Eumolpus invades him with kisses and embracing. The next morning, he gets his reward in the form of a couple of doves.⁴¹ The scenario is repeated the next night, but now Eumolpus is allowed to touch the boy all over, and he takes the initiative of coming closer. Now, the reward is a pair of cocks. The third night, Eumolpus begs for real intercourse—the boy had never pretended more eagerly to sleep. This time, the reward is a horse. However, in the morning it turns out that Eumolpus cannot deliver the horse. At the next encounter, the boy immediately asks for the gift, when they embrace for the first time.⁴²

Due to this discontent, there is a pause spanning a few days. At night, when Eumolpus is sure that the boy's father is asleep, he again goes to his room for reconciliation and sex. But the angry lad refuses him, threatening that he will tell everything to his father. With a little force and constraint—it is explicitly said that the boy finds some pleasure in Eumolpus's naughty ways—the love game is reassumed. The youth now complains that Eumolpus had made him the laughing stock of his school-fellows, to whom he had boasted of his rich friend, but he immediately asks to do it again. So Eumolpus does, after which he falls asleep, only to be awakened by the boy who is 'in the years of full maturity and at an age when one is eager to take it' (*ephebus plenae maturitatis et annis ad patiendum gesticantibus*)—again Eumolpus eagerly fulfills his duty. Not more than an hour later, the boy asks for a third time: 'Why don't we do it?' at which point the exhausted teacher blushes and threatens to reveal everything to the boy's father.⁴³

Readers versed in classical literature will recognise the genre of the *Milesian Tale*, a series of short lewd stories, which were according to tradition Greek by origin (Aristides, circa 100 BCE), but had already found their way into Latin literature from the first century BCE on, and which were famously used by Apuleius. The plot is divided into two sections (separated by an interval of some days), both of which are reigned by the number three (three presents

and encounters, three mentions of sex in the final night). There is a pause in the middle of the plot, and an abrupt ending which forms a circle with the beginning (telling the father).

For a social historian, this evidence is both fascinating and tricky. First, it should be said that this is not a unique case. *Satyricon* 140–141 has another particularly obscene story about a widow of highest distinction, named Philomela. In earlier days she had gained legacy by the charms of her youth; but now, being old and past her prime, she puts her son and daughter in the way of childless old men. In this way she continues to extend her former trade by the efforts of her successors. She goes to Eumolpus and recommends her children to his wisdom and goodness (*prudential bonitatem*), as he is used to teaching young people (*instruere iuvenes*). The two children are called *pueri*: a very beautiful girl (*filiamque speciosissimam*) and her brother, who is again named as *ephebe* (*cum fratre ephebo*). Eumolpus is left alone with the children, while Philomela pretends to go to the temple for sacred votes. What follows is one of the most explicit sex scenes in Latin literature, picturing a threesome between old Eumolpus and the two teenagers, while they are being watched by Encolpius, the main figure of the *Satyricon*, who is so excited that he is suddenly relieved of his impotence.⁴⁴ Also, the Greek novelist Xenophon of Ephesus adduces a similar pattern: a father hands over his astonishingly beautiful son Hyperanthes, called a *meirakion*, for money to a man (a known lover of boys) on the pretext of educating him (*didaskalia*).⁴⁵

Would readers of these stories only recognise them as ‘just stories’ and literary novels referring to Greek ways, which had little or nothing to do with ‘reality’ in one way or another? For more than one reason, I find this implausible. It has been convincingly stated that Roman images of the Greeks failed, to a surprising degree, to give prominence to the tradition of pederasty as ‘the Greek way,’ ‘the Greek vice,’ or even ‘Greek love.’ Though surely disapproving by traditional Roman standards of behavior, pederastic relations may have generally aroused less anxiety than adultery. So, there is no need to artificially set apart Greek from Roman ways in this case.⁴⁶ Moreover, the novel stories fit with other testimonies about parents handing over their children for sexual services, be it not to teachers.⁴⁷ Also, we should take into account the very casual way in which such novel stories are narrated, implying no moral indignation, let alone anxiety. What we read is actually put as a form of light humor (contrast with nowadays, telling such stories is enough to put an audience to shame—the same reason why, till the mid of the twentieth century, these fragments were often not translated, or omitted or changed in a prudish way). After all, these stories did work and function in a society that largely condoned sexual relations between adults and teenagers, both boys and girls, for whom the late-teenage marriage pattern was omnipresent.⁴⁸ Now and then, even apprenticeship contracts explicitly state that the apprentice should only obey the master in cases that pertain to the learning of the trade involved—again, one might suspect the possibility of other things going on.⁴⁹

The perils of friendship: constructed relatedness and social class as explanatory factors

As mentioned above, Straton of Sardis's erotic and amorous epigrams on boy love made it into the Byzantine collection of epigrams later known as the *Anthologia Palatina*. Book 12 on the *Musa Puerilis* became a taboo subject for translation far into the twentieth century. At least one other of Straton's poems sounds familiar concerning the subject of this essay:

You, teachers (*didaskaloi*), ask for a reward? How ungrateful are you,
What is the matter? Is it not enough for you to see beautiful boys? (*paidia*)
To talk to them, to embrace and to kiss them,
is this not worth more than hundred gold pieces?
If someone has beautiful boys, that he just sends them to me, and that
he regards me with affection,
and he can have the reward he wants by me.

(AP 12. 219, Straton, trans. D. Hine)

In the fourth century, Libanius adduces the image of a teacher (*didaskalos*) who urges his pupil to yield sexual services as a moral example to his audience: in daily life one should never do whatever is commanded.⁵⁰ Libanius is actually the right author to offer a clue to understand the anxiety that lies behind almost all of the concerns about educators we have encountered so far. In fact, his work is full of remarks on the closeness and father-like relation that exists between the rhetor and his students.⁵¹ Quintilian has similar statements: teachers should be considered as parents, not of the body, but of the mind.⁵²

Indeed, the constructed relatedness of the teacher-student bonding can be traced down with authors from the first century BCE to the fifth century CE: Cicero, Pliny, Fronto, Sidonius Apollinaris. They were all Roman aristocrats who took up the responsibility of offering the *tirocinium fori*: oratorical training for sons of relatives or high-class friends. This bonding was often expressed in an almost eroticised language, which expressed deep sentimental friendship.⁵³ Mediterranean society, with its strong tendency of affective relationships among men, only strengthened such tendencies. Often, political struggles were presented as a kind of family vendetta. In such cases, 'renegade' disciples were depicted as effeminate 'sissies'—and, consequently, masters of such *tirocinium fori* were made suspicious.⁵⁴

For grammarians or rhetoricians, an even stronger prejudice arose. While they did not belong to the high aristocratic class, they performed a very crucial role in the upbringing of the young upper class, but as a result were subject to derision due to their class status. I suggest it is precisely this ambiguous role and the anxiety about proper social upbringing of the young that made these teachers subjected to suspicion and 'dirty jokes' on their uncontrolled sexual behavior. This running joke was brought back to Socrates: his bad reputation involving boys and friendship originated from the reading of Plato's *Symposium* or the *Phaedrus*.

Christianity and change?

In the first century CE, the Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus firmly rejected pederasty, in a discourse that emphasised the need for self-restraint and warned against the dangers of effeminacy for the boys involved. The examples adduced by him explicitly mention a man who sold his ‘beautiful son’ (a *meirakion*) to a life of ‘shame.’⁵⁵ As far as the condemnation of pederasty is concerned, Musonius Rufus stood somewhat alone. But other traditions in the ancient world supported his views. Jewish culture strongly condemned pederasty and same-sex unions *tout court* as a ‘pagan vice’—the view is not only uttered emphatically by first-century-CE writer Philo of Alexandria, but continues into the late ancient rabbinic tradition. A passage from *t. Avodah Zarah* 3:2 states that a boy should not be left alone with a Gentile man for elementary education or for an apprenticeship. It does not clearly express the reason why, but the obvious suspicion is that these long-term living situations would create the possibility for pederasty. In the same way, *b. Shabbat* 17a argues that a Jewish boy should not socialise with Gentile boys because of the concern that they are in a state of impurity (*zav*). This concern, however, is interpreted as a way to keep Jewish boys from engaging in homoerotic intercourse—here we are reminded of the Roman concerns about sex in the classroom.⁵⁶ Christian writers joined the fierce condemnations of ‘the abuse of boys’ (*paidophthoria*), as it was considered a truly pagan thing. In all this, not the least in later monastic rules, the pedagogical situation and the danger of interaction between an older instructor and a young disciple comes up time and again. ‘You are already here, there is no need for me to enter,’ states the Devil who had knocked on the door of an Egyptian monastery and saw a handsome boy opening the door.⁵⁷

More than the pagan sources, the Christian authors reveal concerns about female education. In his letter concerning the education of Paula the Younger, Jerome states that her *nutricius* should be a ‘serious man.’ For young Pacatula, he even insists on a complete absence of all male influence.⁵⁸ Also for Paula the Younger’s teacher, Jerome adds the recommendation that he should be of mature age and whose lifestyle and learning are approved. Again, things are not said explicitly, but the protection of the young virgin against her sexuality was probably meant.⁵⁹ The educational letters by Jerome are full of resonances of Quintilian, as in the observation that aristocratic girls should be attended by a group of age peers, rather than be instructed by only one teacher. But even then, a serious, pale, and rather melancholic attendant is preferred to pretty or graceful girls with a sweet singing voice.⁶⁰

Conclusion

In all, the research topic of this chapter originates from Western present-day concerns about children’s rights and protecting them against the psychological damage and trauma caused by educators who are in charge. In most

cases, no similar way of thinking existed in ancient society, where the boundaries between children and adults were not as strictly delineated, and where childhood was much more a social than a psychological category, except for the early Jewish and Christian resistance to these ways.

This is not to say that the ancients had no concern for the education of their young ones and the way teachers dealt with them. However, if fear about sexual relationships in schools was ever expressed (it was admittedly a rather ‘marginal’ theme, often connected to the context of Greekness), this was very much connected to family and honor-related anxiety of the well-to-do, who are the only producers of our literary sources. Also, the moralising discourse that comes up with Musonius Rufus is very much about self-restraint, and surely more about defining oneself—as a philosopher, a Jew, or a Christian—against the practice of ‘what others do.’ Here, the topic of education and pederasty became a matter of identity. In no way does this discourse resemble our anxieties, which are psychologically orientated. In all, both the pagan and the Christian sources on ‘abusing teachers’ stem from a world very far away from ours.

Notes

- 1 The volume stems from a symposium at the University of Bern (Switzerland) in June 2013. See Beatrice Wyss, Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, and Solmeng-Jonas Hirschi (eds.), *Sophisten in Hellenismus und Kaiserzeit: Orte, Methoden und Personen der Bildungsvermittlung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017). A Finnish version appeared as ‘“Näpit irti lapsistani!” Roomalaiset opettajat syytettiin seksuaalisesta hyväksikäytöst Rooman valtakunnassa’, in *Keisarit ja kurtisaanit. Perhe, valta ja seksi antiikin Roomassa* (ed. J. Rantala; Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2018), 97–123.
- 2 Ineke Sluiter, ‘Perversa subtilitas. De kwade roep van de grammaticus,’ *Lampas* 21 (1988): 41–65.
- 3 Alastair J. Blanshard, *Sex, Vice and Love from Antiquity to Modernity* (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2010), 137–139. The relationship between Alcibiades and Socrates apparently was a favorite topic for the matter.
- 4 The Danish movie *Jagten* (directed by Thomas Vinterberg, 2012) tells it all. It is the touching story of a teacher in a small Danish village who becomes the target of mass hysteria after being wrongly accused of sexually abusing a child in his kindergarten class.
- 5 I have dealt extensively with the matter, also referring to the vast recent literature, in Christian Laes, ‘When Classicists Need to Speak Up: Antiquity and Present Day Pedophilia,’ in *Aeternitas Antiquitatis. Proceedings of the Symposium Held in Skopje, August 28 as Part of the 2009 Annual Conference of Euroclassica* (ed. V. Sofronievski; Skopje: ACPH Antika & Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, 2010), 30–59. A re-edition and updated version appeared in *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften/Austrian Journal of Historical Studies* 28.3 (2017): 49–70. For the discourse of pedophiles as monsters, see Riccardo Vattuone, *Il mostro e il sapiente. Studi sull’erotica greca* (Bologna: Patron, 2004), opening with the observation that the wise Athenian statesman Solon would now be considered a monster due to his preference for teenage boys.

- 6 Similar lists have never been compiled, and this article intends to do some pioneering work. A first attempt in M. De Wulf, *Cave magistrum. Beschuldigingen van pederastie in de Romeinse en in de late oudheid op basis van Griekse en Latijnse bronnen* (Unpublished master's thesis, Brussels, 2014).
- 7 See, e.g., among a plethora of scholarly literature: Christian Laes, *Children in the Roman Empire: Outsiders Within* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 107–137.
- 8 Excellent and most readable overviews include Marilyn B. Skinner, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture* (Oxford, Malden MA: Blackwell, 2005); Mark Golden and Peter Toohey (eds.), *A Cultural History of Sexuality, Volume 1: A Cultural History of Sexuality in the Classical World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010); Mark Masterson, Nancy S. Rabinowitz, and James Robson (eds.), *Sex in Antiquity: Exploring Gender and Sexuality in the Ancient World* (London: Routledge, 2014).
- 9 *CIL* 4.4201; 4206 and 4209. See John K. Evans, *War, Women and Children in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1991), 201. For the Athenian context, there is a somewhat uncertain reference from the fourth century BCE to energetic youths pleasing each other on Mount Lykabettos: Theopompus fr. 30 (*Poetae Comici Graeci*, ed. R. Kassel and C. Austin).
- 10 Quintilian, *Inst* 2.2.14–15: *Pueros adolescentibus permixtos sedere non placet mihi. Nam etiamsi uir talis qualem esse oportet studiis moribusque praepositum modestam habere potest etiam iuuentutem, tamen uel infirmitas a robustioribus separanda est, et carendum non solum crimine turpitudinis uerum etiam suspicione. Haec notanda breuiter existimaui. Nam ut absit ab ultimis uitii ipse ac schola ne praecipendum quidem credo.*
- 11 *exigite ut mores teneros ceu pollice ducat, / ut si quis cera uoltum facit; exigite ut sit / et pater ipsius coetus, ne turpia ludant, / ne faciant uicibus. non est leue tot puerorum / obseruare manus oculosque in fine trementis. / 'haec' inquit 'cura; sed cum se uerterit annus, / accipe, uictori populus quod postulat, aurum.*
- 12 See Edward Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* (Berkeley, CA: Athlone Press, 1980), 332, referring to ps-Aristotle, *Probl* 4.880b8. Another possible allusion to sexual play in the classroom in Seneca, *Contr* 4 pr. 11: *'at' inquit 'inter pueriles condiscipulorum sinus lasciva manu obscena iussisti'* (reactions of fellow rhetoricians on an improper word play by the rhetor Haterio).
- 13 Christian Laes and Johan Strubbe, *Youth in the Roman Empire: The Young and the Restless Years?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 223.
- 14 Aeschines, in Tim 9–15. See Nick Fisher, *Aeschines against Timarchos. Translated with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 129–142, for extensive commentary.
- 15 Quintilian, *Inst* 1.3.17: *Pudet dicere in quae probra nefandi homines isto caedendi iure abutantur, quam det aliis quoque nonnumquam occasionem hic miserorum metus. Non morabor in parte hac: nimium est quod intellegitur; 1.2.31: Est quaedam tacita dedignatio vim dicendi tantis comparatam laboribus ad unum auditorem demittere: pudet supra modum sermonis attolli.* Also W. Martin Bloomer, 'Quintilian on the Child as a Learning Subject,' *The Classical World* 105.1 (2011): 109–137, especially 122–123, assumes anxiety on the confusion between pedagogy and pederasty in these passages.
- 16 Quintilian, *Inst* 2.2.3–4: *Nam et adulti fere pueri ad hos praeceptores transferuntur et apud eos iuuenes etiam facti perseverant, ideoque maior adhibenda tum cura est, ut et teneriores annos ab iniuria sanctitas docentis custodiat et ferociores a*

licitia grauitas deterreat; Inst 1.2.4: Corrupti mores in scholis putant: nam et corrumpuntur interim, sed domi quoque, et sunt multa eius rei exempla, tam hercule quam conservatae sanctissime utrobique opinionis. (...) Nam et potest turpis esse domesticus ille praeceptor, nec tutior inter servos malos quam ingenuos parum modestos conversatio est.

- 17 Quintilian, *Inst* 1.2.5: *At si bona ipsius indoles, si non caeca ac sopita parentum socordia est, et praeceptorem eligere sanctissimum quemque, cuius rei praecipua prudentibus cura est, et disciplinam quae maxime severa fuerit licet, et nihilo minus amicum gravem virum aut fidelem libertum lateri filii sui adiungere, cuius adsiduum comitatus etiam illos meliores faciat qui timebantur.*
- 18 Juvenal, *Sat* 10.297–305, observes that it is so rare for beauty to coincide with restrained behavior, and mentions the seducer, who will even dare to corrupt the parents themselves.
- 19 Pliny, *Epist* 3.3.4: *Adest enim adulescenti nostro cum ceteris naturae fortunaeque dotibus eximia corporis pulchritudo, cui in hoc lubrico aetatis non praeceptor modo sed custos etiam rectorque quaerendus est.*
- 20 AP 12.187 (Straton): *How teach a boy that fundamental skill, / Sight-reading when your voice is changing still? / From shrill soprano to gruff bass you swoop! / So quickly, from a whisper to a whoop. / But study harder, show the envious / Active and passive, Dionysius.* See Daryl Hine, *Puerilities: Erotic Epigrams of the Greek Anthology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 87, for this translation.
- 21 Juvenal, *Sat* 10.224: *quot discipulos inclinet Hamillus.*
- 22 Martial, *Epigr* 7.62: *Reclusis foribus grandes percidis, Amille, / et te deprendi, cum facis ista, cupis, / ne quid liberti narrent seruique paterni / et niger obliqua garrulitate cliens. / Non pedicari se qui testatur, Amille, / illud saepe facit quod sine teste facit.* I would now be more careful in the interpretation than I was in Christian Laes, ‘School-Teachers in the Roman Empire: A Survey of the Epigraphical Evidence,’ *Acta Classica* 50 (2007): 109–127, 119. Sluiter (1988), 58 offers the same explanation on Hamillus as a grammarian with a preference for pedophilia.
- 23 Callimachus, Fragment 195, ed. Pfeiffer.
- 24 CLE 91, *CIL* 10.3969 ... *p[a]rce / pudensque vixit omni tempore / Auruncus era[t] / Fu[r]jus erat nomine / magister ludi litterari Philocalus summa quom castitate in / discipulos suos idemque testamenta scripsit cum fide nec / quoiquam pernegavit laesit neminem ita / de / currebat vitam / fidus sine metu eius ossa nunc hic sita sunt posita a centuri(i)s.* For a different interpretation of *castitas*, see Lise Maurice, *The Teacher in Ancient Rome: The Magister and His World* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 180, referring to ‘purity with regard to gain’ or ‘disinterestedness,’ as the opposite of greed.
- 25 Suetonius, *Gram* 16.
- 26 Suetonius, *Gram* 23: *quoniam infamis omnibus vitiis, palamque et Tiberio et mox Claudio praedicantibus, nemini minus institutionem puerorum vel invenum committendam ... Sed maxime flagrabat libidinibus in mulieres ...*
- 27 AP 11.139.
- 28 AP 12.222 (Straton); 12.206 (Straton); 12.34 (Automedon).
- 29 Extensive discussion in Lex Hermans, *Bewust van andere lusten: Homoseksualiteit in het Romeinse keizerrijk* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1995), 83–85, 139–155.
- 30 Lucian, *Dial Mer* 10.
- 31 For this typical accusation towards Socrates (surely in the case of his relationship with Alcibiades), see Diogenes Laërtius, *Vita Philos* 2.23, Nepos, *Alc* 2.2;

ps-Lucian, *Am* 54; Seneca, *De vita beata* 27.5. See Amy Richlin, 'Old Boys: Teacher-Student Bonding in Roman Oratory,' *Classical World* 105.1 (2011): 91–107, 105, on the popularity of Plato's *Phaedrus* as a teaching text in the 100s CE.

32 Lucian, *Eun* 8–9.

33 Lucian, *Symp* 26. Cf. the reactions described in *Symp* 29:

As soon as the man stopped reading, all eyes were turned on Zeno and Diphilus, who were pale with apprehension, and confirmed by their embarrassment the insinuations of Hetoemocles. Aristaenetus was uneasy and disturbed, but urged us to drink, and tried to smooth the matter over with an attempt at a smile. Zeno disappeared shortly after; his attendant had signed to him, as from his father, to retire.

(trans. H.W. Fowler)

34 Such relationships with boys at a later age were only tenable if the pubic hair around their genitals and anus was shaven. See Athenaeus, *Deipn* 13.564f; 565f. Philostratus, *Ep* 58, ps-Lucian, *Am* 26. According to Diogenes Laërtius, *Vit Philos* 7.130, the Stoic perception of Eros concerns friendship, not sex. See Laes (2011), 264–265.

35 Lucian, *Symp* 32.

36 Laes, *Children in the Roman Empire*, 267–268.

37 Lucian, *Alex* 5–6.

38 Philostratus, *Vita Sophist* 2.10.2.

39 Aristides, *Or* 33.20.

40 Juvenal, *Sat* 2.8–10: *frontis nulla fides; quis enim non uicus abundat / tristibus obscenis? castigas turpia, cum sis / inter Socraticos notissima fossa cinaedos?*

41 Petronius, *Sat* 85, on which see Gareth Schmeling, *A Commentary on the Satyricon of Petronius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 361–362. The boy's willingness contrasts with what is expected according to standards as expressed in Plato, *Symp* 184a.

42 Petronius, *Sat* 86, on which see Schmeling, *A Commentary*, 362–363.

43 Petronius, *Sat* 87, on which see Schmeling, *A Commentary*, 363–365.

44 Petronius, *Sat* 140–141, on which see Schmeling, *A Commentary*, 539–545, pointing to the many allusions to the story of the Pergamenian boy.

45 Xenophon, *Ephesius* 3.2.7–8.

46 Craig A. Williams, 'Greek Love at Rome,' *Classical Quarterly* 45 (1995): 517–539.

47 Laes, *Children in the Roman Empire*, 204–206, and Sabine R. Huebner, *The Family in Roman Egypt: A Comparative Approach to Intergenerational Solidarity and Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 116, on prostitution.

48 Laes, *Children in the Roman Empire*, 222–268.

49 See, e.g., *P. Oxy.* 2, 322.

50 Libanius, *Or* 58.30.18–20.

51 See Raffaella Cribiore, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 138–141, on father-teacher and teacher-father in Libanius.

52 Quintilianus, *Inst* 2.9.1–2: *ut praeceptores non minus quam ipsa studia ament, et parentes esse non quidem corporum sed mentium credant.*

53 See Neil W. Bernstein, 'Each Man's Father Served as His Teacher: Constructing Relatedness in Pliny's Letters,' *Classical Antiquity* 27.2 (2008): 203–230; Richlin, 'Old Boys'; Craig A. Williams, *Reading Roman Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

- 54 Richlin, 'Old Boys,' 52.
- 55 Musonius Rufus, *Fragm* (ed. Lutz 1947), 103 lines 6–10. See John W. Martens, '“I Renounce the Sexual Abuse of Boys”: Renegotiating the Boundaries of Sexual Behaviour in Late Antiquity by Jews and Christians,' in *Children and Family in Late Antiquity: Life, Death and Interaction* (ed. C. Laes, K. Mustakallio, and V. Vuolanto; Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 169–211, 175–179, on Musonius Rufus's condemnation of pederasty.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 181–189.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 191–208; Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2013). For the monastical literature, see Christian Laes, 'Young and Old, Parents and Children: Social Relations in the Apophthegmata Patrum,' in *De Amicitia: Social Networks and Relationships in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (ed. Christian Krötzel and Katariina Mustakallio; Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2010), 115–134, 129–130 (the Devil knocking on the door in AP N 457).
- 58 Jerome, *Epist* 107, 4: *habeat ... nutricium gravem* (on Paula the Younger); *Epist.* 128, 4: *Sexus femineus suo iungatur sexui ... Sit ei magistra comes, paedagoga custos* (on Pacatula, with a beautiful addition on eager young men as suitors who try to make their way to a girl of tender age—*aetas mollis et tenera*—with the nutrices acting as chaperons). See Mikko Pentti, 'The Role of Servants in the Upbringing of the Roman Elite Girls in Late Antiquity,' in *Agents and Objects: Children in Pre-Modern Europe* (ed. Katariina Mustakallio and Jussi Hanska; Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2015), 113–131, 120–121.
- 59 Jerome, *Epist* 107, 4. *Magister probae aetatis et vitae atque eruditionis est eligendus*. Also Pentti, 'The Role of Servants,' 124, understands this recommendation as a protection against sexuality.
- 60 Jerome, *Epist* 107, 4: *Habeat in discendo socias, quibus invidet, quarum laudibus mordeatur*; 107, 9: *Placeat ei comes non compta atque formosa, quae liquido gutture carmen dule moduletur, sed gravis, pallens, sordidata, subtristis*. See Pentti, 'The Role of Servants,' 128, referring to Quintilian, *Inst* 1.2.1–29.



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Part III

Children and material culture



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8 I bless you by YHWH of Samaria and his Barbie

A case for understanding Judean pillar figurines as children's toys

Julie Faith Parker

Recently, I watched a YouTube interview in which Dr. Philip Michael Sherman, from Maryville College, interviewed Dr. Erin Darby of the University of Tennessee.¹ Dr. Darby is one of the foremost experts on Judean pillar figurines, which were the focus of her Duke dissertation and subsequent book (published by Mohr Siebeck in 2014).² Judean pillar figurines (commonly known as JPFs) are small standing terracotta statues, about five to seven inches tall, of women holding their breasts. They appear in the archaeological record as early as the tenth century BCE but date largely from Judah in the eighth to seventh centuries BCE.³ Approximately 1,000 of these figurines have been found to date. Judean pillar figurines are immediately recognizable in two forms: the fancier version with a molded head and Egyptian-style wig, and a simpler version with a pinched head and no hair. But what was the purpose of these figurines? Why were they so popular, especially during a particular time period? What did they mean to the people who interacted with them back in ancient Judah?

In the aforementioned interview, Dr. Darby astutely notes that most scholars interpret the Judean pillar figurines to have been used in ways that accord with the scholars' own research interests. A few examples back her point. William Dever, who argues more broadly that the goddess Asherah was widely known as God's wife, sees the JPFs as an accessible embodiment of Asherah.⁴ This remains a popular interpretation of the figurines and has been accepted, with somewhat more caution, by Raz Kletter, Karel van der Toorn, and Philip Johnston, among others.⁵ Carol Meyers, who focuses her research on women and the ancient Israelite household, understands JPFs as magic objects 'meant to secure fertility, safe childbirth and/or adequate lactation.'⁶ Ian Wilson, who researches the histories and cultures of the Ancient Near East, sees the JPFs as a Judean 'attempt to maintain local identity as the Neo-Assyrian empire rapidly expanded and absorbed much of the region.'⁷ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, whose work concentrates on ancient Near Eastern women's religious practices, understands JPFs as 'a kind of tangible prayer for fertility and nourishment.'⁸ Most scholars who have researched JPFs are quick to dismiss the possibility of these figurines as interacting with children in any significant way, with the notable exception of Kristine Garraway. Garraway

instead argues that JPFs were valuable tools of enculturation for children in eighth-century Judah.⁹ She suggests that children may have participated in the ceramic production of JPFs and likely absorbed values about their own worth and roles through interaction with these figurines.¹⁰ Her groundbreaking work paves the way for further childist (discussion below) exploration of the Judean pillar figurines.

This article explores the possibility of understanding JPFs as children's toys, with particular attention to Barbie dolls due to the multiple commonalities between JPFs and Barbies (discussion below). An outline of the material and cultural similarities between Barbies and JPFs suggests that perhaps children in antiquity engaged with JPFs in ways similar to how children today interact with dolls. After reviewing points that scholars raise *against* seeing JPFs as toys, I will question their reasoning and assumptions. Social-scientific evidence will further advance this argument. An original imagined narrative proposes my own researched understanding as to how JPFs may have functioned in ancient Israel. To be clear: I will not argue that JPFs were created solely to be used as items of amusement for children. Rather, I seek to undermine assumptions that divorce JPFs from the lives of children in antiquity and then propose an alternative possibility.

Childist biblical interpretation

The approach of this article offers an example of the emerging field within in biblical studies called childist biblical interpretation. While the term 'childist' is still new, increasingly scholars find it useful to name the focus on children and childhood in the biblical world.¹¹ Analogous to feminist biblical interpretation, childist interpretation turns attention to children with an eye to reassess their roles and importance. Just as the women of the Bible were largely overlooked in biblical scholarship until the last quarter of the twentieth century, children have been neglected in biblical scholarship until the early twenty-first century.¹²

Childist biblical interpretation underscores the many reasons for studying children in the biblical world. First, many people in antiquity did not live long enough to become adults. Anthropologists note that in societies with short life expectancies *at least* one-third of the population consists of children and youth.¹³ To examine the ancient world and ignore young people, as many scholars do, is to bypass much (if not most) of the culture one seeks to understand. Second, young characters appear throughout the Bible, often to introduce a character who becomes well-known in the text, although sometimes young characters (usually minor characters) appear only as children or youth.¹⁴ Exploring the tales of famous biblical personages first as children gives insights into their development in biblical narratives. Third, examining texts that contain episodes with little-known children can offer information about the lives of children in antiquity; minor characters need to behave in ways consonant with their culture so as not to divert attention from the

narrative's focus. Fourth, studying the text and the ancient world through the lens of children provides new angles for understanding topics such as labor, adoption, sacrifice, rituals, warfare, slavery, captivity, prostitution, abandonment, inheritance, and education. Fifth, children have a critical theological role in the Hebrew Bible as the bearers of the covenant and perpetuators of religious traditions.¹⁵ Sixth, having been a child is a commonality among all adults, ancient and modern, and offers a unique point of shared entry to understanding a child character in a text or tradition. Seventh, awareness of children and the effort required to ensure their survival, as well as children's participation in the tasks of life, invites more accurate interpretation of the archeological record. This list of reasons is not exhaustive, but begins to show all that can be gained by including a focus on children in studies of antiquity. As we undertake these studies, the word 'childist' serves as a multivalent term that can be applied to a wide range of approaches.¹⁶

The childist approach of this article then questions scholarly interpretation of archeological evidence to uncover adult-centered biases in interpreting the use of JPFs. Since children were integral to quotidian existence and a sizable (if not majority) demographic in ancient populations, why are scholars so sure that young people did not interact meaningfully with these figurines, perhaps even as toys?

Judean pillar figurines: ancient Barbies?

A viewer who sees a JPF with no preconceived ideas about its origin or use might naturally assume this figurine was an ancient doll, even a popular type of doll, like a Barbie. The base is just the right size for a small hand to grasp. The small statue has a pillar base that enables it to stand independently and be held easily. The faces have a pleasant expression with a slight smile, making the figurine well suited to offer company or comfort. In addition to its shape and visage, a JPF might further evoke association with Barbie because of its form as an adult woman, as dolls were shaped until the late nineteenth century.¹⁷ Indeed, one seeing a JPF might instantly understand the figurine as Judean antiquity's version of a Barbie.

Given some academic and visual attention, the list of similarities between Barbie dolls and JPFs evolves to be fairly extensive. Both Barbies and JPFs are immensely popular and found in both elite and common households.¹⁸ While located primarily in domiciles, they may also be discovered in public spaces.¹⁹ Barbies and JPFs are/were mass produced from molds, resulting in items that are essentially the same size and shape, exhibiting only minor variety and making them instantly recognizable.²⁰ The materials used to make these figures (plastic/clay) are relatively inexpensive.²¹ While male versions exist, the female forms are much more prevalent.²² Both Barbies and JPFs are in the form of standing adult women, with shapes that call attention to sexual features. The figures come in fancier forms (genuine trademark Barbies/with Egyptian hairstyles) and simpler versions (cheap knock-off

Barbies/pinched faces). Their faces have expressions that feature slight smiles and the figures are decorated with paint.²³ The figures play a role in enculturation and forming gender identity.²⁴ Used Barbies and JPFs are thrown away and found in domestic waste.²⁵ The head can get separated from the body.²⁶ Finally, both Barbies and JPFs explode in popularity during a certain time period, reflecting the cultural pressures of that time.²⁷ The abundance of these parallels prompts closer attention to the possibility of viewing JPFs as children's toys.

Arguments against understanding JPFs as toys

Despite the many ways that JPFs resemble Barbie dolls, scholars are quick to discount any comparison between JPFs and toys. Philip Johnston points out that the figurines are not defined on the back, with the clay left unfinished and unpainted. He asserts that the JPFs 'were not intended to be handled or carried about, and *certainly not to be played with*'²⁸ (emphasis mine). Yet the base of the JPF makes it very easy to carry and the size makes it convenient to transport. Like the waist of a Barbie doll, a small hand could naturally take hold at the base. The contention that these were 'certainly not to be played with' because there is no decoration on the back is a non-sequitur. Children play with all kinds of items—sticks become swords, mud becomes pies, corn husks become dolls—without any need for an object's artistic symmetry. Why would a lack of detail on the back discourage children from playing with JPFs?

Raz Kletter explains that understanding JPFs as toys 'was made in the early phases of research, but was never popular' for multiple reasons.²⁹ First, Kletter maintains that JPFs are not toys because they are found in public buildings. Yet JPFs have been found in a wide range of contexts, including both public and domestic settings.³⁰ We find traces of children's culture in communal facilities today, such as libraries or houses of worship. While the presence of children in household spaces needs no explanation, it seems questionable to presume that children were barred from public places in an age-integrated society. Second, Kletter notes that 'JPFs are very uniform in shape, whereas toys usually exhibit an individual character, either by manufacture, decoration, or through use by children.'³¹ Barbies are very uniform in shape. Their character varies little in manufacture, decoration, or use by children. How would we know what expectations existed for the items that children used as toys? Next, Kletter observes, like Johnston above, that the JPFs were meant to stand and be seen from the front.³² Yet perhaps a built-in stand was a desirable feature for dolls in the ancient world. While this observation is conjectural, equally conjectural is the statement that JPFs were not dolls because they did stand and face forward. Maybe JPFs were toys that children and families wanted for display, as many people collect toys for display purposes today. Dolls can be used in multiple ways—not only for active playing but also to keep a child company. Perhaps the standing figure was a comfort to

a child who was working all day and did not have the leisure of indulging in hours of imaginary play. Survival was hard and a doll standing nearby while a girl ground grain or wove cloth might be a comforting companion. Fourth, Kletter notes that ‘the JPFs are very vulnerable, while toys should stand the wear and tear of playing.’³³ As is well known, the vast majority of JPFs that have been recovered are broken. Kletter’s own research shows that the JPFs broke in natural places, not through intentional rites of destruction.³⁴ Perhaps they broke because children were playing with them and dropped them. It is possible that children’s handling of JPFs led to so many found in a state that indicates that they had been dropped, perhaps by hands less coordinated than those of adults.

Kletter also notes that JPFs are not found in children’s graves.³⁵ Elizabeth Bloch-Smith points out that ‘with the possible exception of “gaming pieces” and rattles for young children, frivolous or amusement items were not included in burial assemblages.’³⁶ Maybe JPFs are not in children’s burials because they were toys for children, and therefore not included among grave goods as a ‘frivolous or amusement’ item. Some JPFs are found in adult graves, because JPFs were not toys for adults.³⁷

Karel van der Toorn also discounts the possibility of JPFs having been used as dolls. His argument seeks to interpret JPFs in relation to biblical texts, which, not surprisingly, does not point to a connection with children, who are rarely the focus of the text. Nonetheless, van der Toorn recognizes the association between JPFs and Barbies, if only to dismiss it.

Even if there is no word for ‘Barbie’ in the Hebrew Bible, Israelite girls would certainly have had their dolls. Unfortunately, however, these dolls can hardly be identified with the figurines that have been found. The typology of the figurines does not militate against their interpretation as puppets and toys, but their distribution over the various sites does. The very same type of figurine found in a domestic context is also discovered in graves; they must have had similar, if not identical, functions—functions that can hardly be reduced to those of toys.³⁸

The premise from which van der Toorn refutes a link between JPFs and dolls is debatable. Why must the items found in graves have the same use in life as in death? It is certainly possible that an object would be inserted into a grave for sentimental reasons instead of utilitarian ones—or did these distinctions even exist? On what basis can modern academics so confidently aver the intent of ancient anonymous people?

Rather, other insights can be deduced from the distribution of JPFs. Keel and Uehlinger point out that ‘pillar figurines are often found in houses and graves along with small model beds, little lamps, and rattles.’³⁹ The association between JPFs and rattles among grave goods could show that both items identify a connection to children, perhaps with their parents. Van der Toorn’s separation between items used by children and items found to have other

(religious?) significance in graves relies on a distinction between toy and religious object that comes from our modern understanding of toys. We separate the worlds of children and adults; in most areas of life, the ancients did not. Maybe the presence of JPFs in graves alongside other items indicates how the worlds of children and adults were intertwined both in life and in death.

Finally, the suggestion that there is no archeological evidence to connect the JPFs with children is an argument from silence.⁴⁰ Archeologist Jane Baxter explains, 'Children's artifacts have high degrees of overlap with adult artifacts and areas of household activity.'⁴¹ Since society was age-integrated, the likelihood of uncovering evidence that links JPFs exclusively to children is small. Conversely, if we make the association ourselves through interpretation of the figures, the JPFs could be connected with children through the prominent breasts, which suggest lactation and preserving life for babies.

To reiterate my point at the outset: I do not think there is enough evidence to argue definitively that JPFs were the ancient equivalent of Barbie dolls, just as there is not enough evidence to determine that JPFs were living prayers, fertility objects, cultural identity markers, or Asherah figurines (as discussed above).⁴² As Carol Meyers points out, because these figurines do not have accompanying texts to clarify their use, all of our scholarship is educated guesswork.⁴³ Rather, I seek to push back against the predominantly derisive attitude in scholarship about equating JPFs with children. The lives of children and adults were intertwined in ancient Israel.⁴⁴ Just as JPFs played a part in adult lives, it seems reasonable that they would have been part of children's lives as well.

Playing and imagining: children and JPFs

Given the *umwelt* of ancient tribal societies, it is indeed possible and even likely that children in ancient Judah interacted with JPFs more than scholars generally presume, including in ways that we associate with toys.⁴⁵ In an article about play in antiquity, Maria Sommer and Dion Sommer note that 'artifacts may have multiple functions, and these functions can change ... Dolls, for example, may have been both toys and sacred objects, tools of play but also objects of religious importance in so-called transition rituals.'⁴⁶ This association between object used for both play and devotion might explain the presence of JPFs among grave goods. Perhaps JPFs had deep meaning for adults and children engaged with them in ways that were important in their daily lives, much as children interact with toys.

Sociological studies encourage our understanding of JPFs as items for children's play because definitions of play are broad. Sociologist Brian Sutton-Smith outlines various types of playful activity, including play that involves performance, items, celebrations, engagement with others, or solitary play. Play involves a wide diversity of equipment. Indeed, Sutton-Smith points out, 'practically anything can be an agent for some kind of play.'⁴⁷ Anthropologists point out that the work/play dichotomy is a product of

Western, post-industrial societies, and often not found in non-industrialized societies.⁴⁸ Historical evidence also counters modern Western understandings that hold play as non-productive and focused on fun.⁴⁹ What constitutes play is notoriously difficult to determine.⁵⁰ Mostly it is defined as activity that is not work. Judean pillar figurines were not tools physically manipulated to accomplish tasks of survival, which pushes our understanding of their use toward the realm of play. Despite the secondary importance that we in the modern, Western world often ascribe to play when compared to work, researchers concur that play has an important role in the lives of children. The activity of play not only generates self-understanding by exploring roles and identities, but also empowers children to exert some control in their lives.⁵¹ Part of our challenge in seeing JPFs as toys or objects for play is our own modern, Western, limited understanding of what this means.

To expand the possibilities as to how JPFs were used, I offer an imagined scene of girls in ancient Judah engaging with Judean pillar figurines, based on the above research.⁵² The main character in this story, Tirzah, would be an adolescent—clearly a youth or even a child by our standards. As the story illustrates, concepts of play are broad and distinctions between work and play and sacred and secular are fluid in the ancient Judean context.

The year is 715 BCE. Tirzah is about thirteen years old and lives in the region of Tel Beit Mirsim, in her cluster of family houses.⁵³ She is of no interest to the writers of sacred texts, who live a few days' journey away in Jerusalem, and, in fairness, they are of no interest to her either. Their elitist aniconic writings are irrelevant to her days, which focus on survival. Tirzah works very hard from sunup to sundown helping her mother, Shirah, in the work of the household and the two of them are very close. Now that Tirzah is approaching menarche, Shirah feels sad. She knows that her daughter will soon be eligible for marriage and therefore leaving her household. This mother may never see her beloved daughter again.

Shirah has noticed the small figurines that her neighbors have. There are two kinds; some are simple standing figures with a crude head shape, and some are more ornate, with defined features and hairstyles. Yet both types are similar in that they are an easy portable size, with a pillar bottom that serves as a base and a handle, and a buxom female shape holding breasts. These small statues have become very popular and are even a source of status. People believe that the figurines bring protection to daughters who leave their family homes. This security is especially important at this time of impending danger and political unrest.⁵⁴ Word travels quickly when danger is near and the Judeans know only too well what happened to their neighbors to the north. Shirah and her family fear hostile invaders. Tribal life feels fragile. Families are desperate for assurance that they will be safe. For all these reasons, Shirah is intent on getting a figurine for Tirzah because these figures are believed to

protect girls when they leave their family home to get married. Fortunately, Shirah's cousin, Zabad, will soon be traveling to Jerusalem. Shirah works extra hard to make three baskets, which she gives to her cousin, to exchange for a figurine for Tirzah that he will get in Jerusalem.⁵⁵

A few weeks later, Zabad returns with a figurine that he gives to Shirah. She is delighted and presents the figure to Tirzah, who is also overjoyed. Tirzah knows that this doll will help her stay safe in the scary time of transition when she will have to leave her family. Tirzah places the figurine near the place of her sleeping mat. Like everyone else in the household, Tirzah has no privacy. Yet each person in the household sleeps in the same spot every night and this is her place. Her younger sister, Abia, now seven years old, is attracted to the figurine. The doll's womanly shape, her soft smile, the painted necklace, her coiffed hairstyle, and even the confidence projected from this sturdy female figure, intrigue Abia. Occasionally, she picks up the doll to play with her—but only when no one else is around. Those times are rare. When Abia does get the chance to play with the doll, she is very careful. The figurines are precious and break easily. Once they break, they cannot be repaired, and get thrown away. Tirzah is happy to have the fancy kind of doll; both she and Abia have seen the simpler, cheaper versions. Every household seems to have a figurine these days. Tirzah will take hers with her when she leaves the family. Some young women travel with their figurines as a reminder of the homes that they left and the mothers who nurtured them. Some young women become so attached to their figurines that they take them with them wherever they go, which is not hard due to the portable size and shape. Some women even take them to their graves to ensure the survival of the children they left behind.

This small statue becomes a comfort to Tirzah as she anticipates moving away from her home. Tirzah believes that this image of a healthy woman proudly offering her large breasts will ensure Tirzah's own fertility, one day enabling her to have healthy children. Now, while still living with her family, Tirzah takes great comfort in the companionship of her figurine. She looks at the doll's smiling face before going to sleep each night. The figurine's gentle expression reassures Tirzah that, even in these times of turbulence, she will be safe when she must leave her mother's household.

The above scenario does not directly contradict possible uses of JPFs mentioned at the outset of this chapter; rather, it expands upon them by including the involvement of children and youth in ways that accord with available evidence. An object could have served multiple functions, even at the same time, as the story of Tirzah suggests. To draw a firm line between a 'toy' (read: frivolous object solely for children's amusement) and 'tool' or 'cultic object' (read: significant item solely for use by adults) is to heavily impose our modern framework of thinking on ancient artifacts. Clear distinctions between toy/tool, magic/mundane, and work/play all stem from concepts in

Western industrial society. We need to recognize how these anachronisms pervade and cloud our conceptual framework. I expect that children in the ancient world played with stones and sticks and other items easily found, which we would correctly see as toys. But toys are not limited to expendable items. I also suspect that children interacted with objects such as JPFs in ways that gave meaning to their lives and helped them understand their roles in society, much as toys do for children today.

Conclusion

Like the scholars discussed at the outset of this article, I also have my lens, here a childist one, through which I view the JPFs. My argument is not that JPFs were the ancient equivalent of Barbie dolls, nor do I think that JPFs were made for the express purpose of delighting children, even though the similarities between JPFs and Barbies are more striking than we generally notice. Yet the assurance with which most scholars dismiss or even deride a connection between JPFs and children should give us pause. It is highly likely that children and youth in ancient Judah would have been drawn to these figurines and, as part of this age-integrated culture, would have engaged with them in meaningful, and perhaps even playful, ways. To state—confidently and continually—that JPFs were separated from the lives of children says more about scholars' tendency to disregard children in the ancient world than it does about the use of Judean pillar figurines.

Notes

- 1 YouTube, 'Dr. Erin Darby, Expert on Judean Pillar Figurines, Speaks at College,' YouTube.com. www.youtube.com/watch?v=waQ4IMevPNM.
- 2 Erin Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines: Gender and Empire in Judean Apotropaic Ritual* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).
- 3 For a helpful bibliographic review on JPFs see, Ian Douglas Wilson, 'Judean Pillar Figurines and Ethnic Identity in the Shadow of Assyria,' *JSOT* 36.3 (2012): 260, fn. 1.
- 4 William G. Dever, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 194–195.
- 5 See Raz Kletter, 'Between Archaeology and Theology: The Pillar Figurines from Judah and the Asherah,' in *Studies in the Archeology of the Iron Age in Israel and Jordan* (ed. Amihai Mazar; JSOTSup 331; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 205. Karel van der Toorn, 'Israelite Figurines: A View from the Texts,' in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archeology and the Religion of Israel* (ed. Barry M. Gittlen; Grand Rapids, MI: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 62. Philip Johnston, 'Figuring out Figurines,' *TynBul* 54.2 (2003): 103. See also Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (trans. Thomas Trapp; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 333–336. For a broader review of interpretation of JPFs, including discussion of seeing JPFs as representatives of Asherah, see Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines*, 34–50.

- 6 Carol Meyers, *Household and Holiness: The Religious Culture of Israelite Women* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 31.
- 7 Wilson, 'Judean Pillar Figurines,' 260.
- 8 Tikva Fymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 159.
- 9 Kristine Garroway, 'Children and Religion in the Archaeological Record of Ancient Israel,' *JANER* 17 (2017): 116–139.
- 10 Garroway, 'Children and Religion,' 129–130. Garroway draws on the research of Joe Uziel and Rona S. Avissar Lewis, who examine fingerprints on vessels from Tel Nagila. Out of forty-eight miniature handmade vessels found at this site, seventeen had discernable fingerprints; ten of these seventeen sets of fingerprints were from children under ten years of age. Joe Uziel and Rona S. Avissar Lewis, 'The Tel Nagila Middle Bronze Age Homes—Studying Household Activities and Identifying Children in the Archaeological Record,' *PEQ* 145.4 (2013): 290.
- 11 For fuller discussion, see Kathleen Gallagher Elkins and Julie Faith Parker, 'Children in Biblical Narrative and Childist Interpretation,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative* (ed. Danna Nolan Fewell; New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 422–426.
- 12 In February 2018, biblical scholars from the USA, Canada, and Europe gathered at the University of Southern California for conference entitled 'Listening to and Learning from Children in the Biblical World,' organized by Kristine Garroway of Hebrew Union College. This meeting coincided with the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the Children in the Biblical World section of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2008. Over the course of this decade, scholarly publications focused on children in the biblical world have expanded markedly and continue to proliferate at an ever-increasing rate.
- 13 Andrew Chamberlain, 'Minor Concerns: A Demographic Perspective on Children in Past Societies,' in *Children and Material Culture* (ed. Joanna Sofaer Derevenski; London: Routledge, 2000), 207. Chamberlain further observes that children were 'the predominant group of individuals in most past societies.' Andrew T. Chamberlain, 'Commentary: Missing Stage of Life – Towards the Perception of Children in Archaeology,' in *Invisible People and Processes: Writing Gender and Childhood into European Archaeology* (ed. Jenny Moore and Eleanor Scott; London: Leicester University Press, 1997), 250.
- 14 Examples of well-known children and youth in the Hebrew Bible include Ishmael (Gen 21:9–20), Isaac (Gen 21:1–12; 22:1–13), Rebekah (Gen 24), Joseph (Gen 37), Moses (Exod 2:1–10), Miriam (Exod 2:1–10 [although anonymous in this passage]), Samuel (1 Sam 3:1–18), David (1 Sam 17), Esther (esp. Esth 2:1–20), and Daniel (esp. Dan 1:1–19). Characters who appear only as children or youth are harder to notice and often (but not always) remain nameless, e.g., Jether (Judg 8:20–21), Abijah (1 Kgs 14:1–18), the son of the widow at Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:10–24), the Shunammite's son (2 Kgs 4:17–37; 8:1–6), and the Israelite slave girl (2 Kgs 5:1–14).
- 15 See Deut 4:9–10; 6:1–7; 11:19–21.
- 16 Some scholars refer to 'childhood studies,' but this phrase suggests conceptions of the period when one is a child; 'childist' transcends this limit. Others refer to 'child-centered interpretation,' which is workable but verbose. (Analogously, scholars do not speak of 'woman-centered interpretation' or 'queer-centered interpretation.') Literary studies have reviewed biblical texts through the lens of 'the

child,' but this phrase subtly suggests that one child stands in metonymically for all. (By comparison, we do not read through a lens centered on 'the adult' because too many particularities disappear.) Due to the limitations of alternate language, contrasted by the flexible, comprehensive meaning and resonance with feminist interpretation, I find 'childist' a helpful and useful term.

- 17 Kirsten F. Schmidt, 'Dolls,' in vol. 1 of *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood: In History and Society* (ed. Paula S. Fass; New York: Macmillan, 2004), 281. For photos of adult dolls from antiquity, see Jennifer Neils and John H. Oakley, *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece: Images of Childhood from the Classical Past* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 267, 268. The cover of the book also shows a bas-relief of a child holding an adult doll. Images of dolls as adult women, spanning millennia, abound. See also Antonia Fraser, *A History of Toys* (New York: Delacorte), 10–13.
- 18 Wilson, 'Judean Pillar Figurines,' 269.
- 19 Johnston, 'Figuring out Figurines,' 102.
- 20 Kletter, 'Between Archaeology and Theology,' 189.
- 21 Johnston, 'Figuring out Figurines,' 85.
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 Kletter describes JPFs that had been white-washed in lime, to highlight painted decoration. Traces of paint can be found on JPFs adorning the face and upper body or providing bracelets and necklaces. Paints were red, yellow, brown, black, or combinations of these colors. Kletter, 'Between Archaeology and Theology,' 189, 182.
- 24 The JPFs' breasts may have imparted messages to children about the importance of babies and their survival. As markers of cultural identity, JPFs would be understood by children who would, in turn, perpetuate their use and relay their interpretation. On the formation of gender identity in children, see Garroway, 'Children and Religion,' 120–121.
- 25 Johnston, 'Figuring out Figurines,' 101.
- 26 Kletter explains that the breakage of figurines likely occurred from being dropped. The arms are the most vulnerable place for breakage, followed by the neck. Kletter, 'Between Archaeology and Theology,' 190–191.
- 27 Both Ian Wilson and Ryan Byrne point to Assyrian military domination as the stimulating factor in the eighth-century rise of JPFs. Byrne suggests that the proliferation of JPFs stems from a state ideology designed to encourage reproduction and bolster the Judean population. Ryan Byrne, 'Lie Back and Think of Judah: The Reproductive Politics of Pillar Figurines,' *NEA* 67.3 (2004): 143. Wilson argues that the JPFs explode in popularity was a way 'to maintain ethnic identity and protect elements of [Judean] social identity.' Barbie also exploded in popularity due to cultural factors of its time period. First debuted in 1959, Barbie and her many purchasable accompaniments coincided with the formidable economic expansion of the 1960s, when the US economy experienced uninterrupted growth. Barbie went on to become the best-selling toy in history, with over 1 billion Barbie dolls sold. See Miriam Forman-Brunell, 'Barbie,' in vol. 1 of *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood: In History and Society* (ed. Paula S. Fass; New York: Macmillan, 2004), 80–81.
- 28 Johnston, 'Figuring out Figurines,' 86.
- 29 Kletter, 'Between Archaeology and Theology,' 195.
- 30 Byrne, 'Lie Back,' 139.

- 31 Kletter, 'Between Archaeology and Theology,' 195.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 195–196.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 196.
- 34 Kletter conducted experiments dropping modern facsimiles of JPFs and reviews arguments suggesting that the figurines were intentionally broken, then concludes that 'accidental breakage is the better option.' Kletter, 'Between Archaeology and Theology,' 193.
- 35 As Garroway notes, children have only recently received specific attention from archaeologists. For an introduction to archaeological methodology applied to children in the ANE household, see Kristine Garroway, *Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household (EANECS 3; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014)*, 2–5.
- 36 Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (JSOTSup 123; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 94. Bloch-Smith notes that the most common item found in burials was a rattle. Judean pillar figurines are found as well as male figurines, horse-and-rider pairs, birds, dogs, shrines, model beds, and thrones. She surmises that these items are to solicit divine attention on behalf of the dead and their living family members.
- 37 Bloch-Smith notes that the more sophisticated figurines, with molded heads, are more common in tombs. She suggests that these figurines were believed to have powers that would help ensure the survival and well-being of babies in the family line. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices*, 98.
- 38 Van der Toorn, 'Israelite Figurines,' 53.
- 39 Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 333. I am grateful to Jason Riley for pointing out this citation.
- 40 Kletter, 'Between Archaeology and Theology,' 196.
- 41 Jane Eva Baxter, *The Archaeology of Childhood: Children, Gender, and Material Culture* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), 77.
- 42 Notably, the JPFs do not seem to represent Asherah since the figurines lack the iconography associated with goddesses, including headdresses, weapons, or animals. See Darby, *Interpreting Judean Pillar Figurines*, 39.
- 43 Carol Meyers, 'Terracottas without Texts,' *To Break Every Yoke: Essays in Honor of Marvin L. Chaney* (ed. R.B. Coote and N.K. Gottwald; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 115–130.
- 44 In ancient Israel, children's daily existence would have been integrated with those of adults, who would expend significant energy and resources on helping children survive. Based on archeological research of highland settlements in Israel, Lawrence Stager estimates that during Iron I only one-third of children born would survive into adulthood. Lawrence Stager, 'The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel,' *BASOR* 260 (1985): 18. In this precarious environment, children were necessary not only for cultural survival, but for a family's survival, since they were valuable workers and eventually caretakers of aging parents. Most people in ancient Israel lived to their thirties, on average, making children a predominant segment of the population. Children therefore played a large (and largely underappreciated) role in ancient societies. For detailed discussion of life spans in ancient Israel, see Milton Eng, *The Days of Our Years: A Lexical Semantic Study of the Life Cycle in Biblical Hebrew* (LHBOTS 464; New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 35–44.

- 45 Defining something as a toy in archeology often depends on its similarity to toys of today, as well as its size, shape, and material. Uziel and Avissar Lewis further note,

Children's toys represent a fulfilment of their immediate needs, but they are also fun and challenge and mimic adults and their world. The toys that are made by adults are purposefully made for educational reasons, and most likely reflect an important part of the cultural rituals that exist in the grown-up world.
(Uziel and Avissar Lewis, 'Tel Nagila Middle Bronze Age Homes,' 271)
- 46 Maria Somer and Dion Sommer, 'Archaeology and Developmental Psychology: A Brief Survey of Ancient Athenian Toys,' *American Journal of Play* 9.3 (2017): 343.
- 47 Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 4–5, 218.
- 48 Helen B. Schwartzman, *Transformations: The Anthropology of Play* (New York: Plenum, 1978), 3.
- 49 Sutton-Smith, *Ambiguity of Play*, 219.
- 50 Schwartzman, *Transformations*, 303.
- 51 William A. Corsaro, 'Play' in vol. 2 of *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood: In History and Society* (ed. Paula S. Fass; New York: Macmillan, 2004), 686.
- 52 Imagined scenarios based on research offer an engaging and educational entry into the biblical world. See, for example, Oded Borowski, 'A Day in the Life of the Ahuzum Family,' in *Daily Life in Biblical Times* (ABS 5; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 109–126; Jennie R. Ebeling, 'Orah's Story,' in *Women's Lives in Biblical Times* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 23–25, 43–45, 61–63, 79–81, 95–97, 113–115, 129–132; Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, 'A Day in Micah's Household,' in *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 12–19; Julie Faith Parker, 'You Are a Bible Child: Exploring the Lives of Children and Mothers through the Elisha Cycle,' in *Women in the Biblical World: A Survey of Old and New Testament Perspectives* (ed. Elizabeth A. McCabe; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009), 59–69; Karel van der Toorn, 'Nine Months among the Peasants in the Palestinian Highlands: An Anthropological Perspective on Local Religion in the Early Iron Age,' in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina (Proceedings of the Centennial Symposium W.F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research and American Schools of Oriental Research Jerusalem, May 29-May 31, 2000)* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 393–410.
- 53 Tel Beit Mirsim is approximately forty miles southwest of Jerusalem, in the southern low hills of Judah. This was the location of W.F. Albright's excavation and has yielded close to forty JPFs, found in almost half of the excavated sites. Byrne, 'Lie Back,' 140.
- 54 This scenario is dated after the fall of Samaria to the Assyrians (722 BCE) but before the Assyrian destruction of Lachish (701 BCE). Tel Beit Mirsim is less than ten miles southeast of Lachish.
- 55 Over half of all figurines found were excavated from Jerusalem. For a chart showing unearthed figurines' places of origin, see Byrne, 'Lie Back,' 141.

9 Coming of age at St Stephen's

Bioarcheology of children at a Byzantine Jerusalem monastery (fifth to seventh centuries CE)

Susan Guise Sheridan

In 1995, we began the exhumation of a repository in a multi-chambered tomb housing the human remains from a Byzantine monastery in East Jerusalem. Historical records indicate that this was the site of a large, wealthy monastery, built by Empress Eudocia to honor Christianity's protomartyr Stephen.¹ For the past twenty-three years, we have been studying the 15,000+ bones and fragments exhumed from that repository to create a bioarcheological model of daily life at Byzantine St Stephen's. Nearly two-thirds of the bones belonged to adult men, the remaining represent children ranging in age from seven months *in utero* to sixteen-to-eighteen years old. While there is a large body of written material from the period describing aspects of life at this 'vast tenementous,'² no mention of children has been found.

In this chapter, I will discuss our results for the bones of the children themselves, synthesized with the cultural record available for the period and region. My goal is to clarify who they were in relation to the monastery, through a process of elimination. As in any forensic analysis, I will create as strong a circumstantial case for identity as possible, using a variety of variables from a plethora of sources.

Bioarcheological approach

Bioarcheology describes the integration of biological anthropology and archeology.³ Osteology, skeletal biology, and biomechanics, for example, are combined with material culture and viewed through the lens of social theory to assess life in antiquity. Distinct from the 'physical anthropology' of decades ago, bioarcheology has shifted from descriptive studies to a broader assessment of human adaptation, aided by a set of theoretical models and a robust tool kit of new methods.⁴ Environmental, social, and biological elements are now factored into predictive templates to systematically evaluate past lifeways, at the population and individual levels.⁵

In life, bone is a robust tissue that provides protection, leverage, support, and storage, therein recording metabolic interactions. As such, 'the same features that make [bone] resistant to degradation ... make it an excellent repository of past biological activity.'⁶ However, bone can only respond to

physiological stressors in a limited number of ways; thus, the written and material records provide an aid for differential diagnosis of skeletal features. Taken in tandem, the synthesis of the textual, archeological, and biological records combine for a fuller picture of life at Byzantine St Stephen's monastery than any single line of evidence can provide in isolation.

Human activities of the past 10,000–15,000 years fall within the temporal scope of bioarcheology.⁷ The same topics studied by theologians and historians working in the southern Levant are enhanced by an integrative anthropological approach. Examples include analyses of: the importance of children in early societies;⁸ regional trade networks;⁹ the role of women in antiquity;¹⁰ effects of disease and pestilence;¹¹ treatment of the dead;¹² ethnicity;¹³ diet;¹⁴ daily life for elites and the general populace;¹⁵ the prevalence and severity of violence;¹⁶ and, drivers of cultural change.¹⁷

I employ the '6Ds of Bioarcheology'¹⁸ when analyzing human skeletal collections (Figure 9.1): **D**emography (age, sex), **D**iet (foods consumed vs. menu available), **D**isease (paleopathology), **D**aily life (activity patterns), **D**eath (treatment of and relationship to the dead), and **bioD**istance (genetic relatedness, migration). Just as the symbol, art, and myth of a group cannot be understood without understanding the physiological limits of the human body, patterns of morbidity and mortality cannot be separated from the cultural context in which an individual exists. With this approach, information from the sciences (physical, natural, and social) and humanities is synthesized for a holistic view of the past. These areas inform our understanding of the deceased, whether focused on adaptations of the individual or of the community as a whole.

Unfortunately, the examination of ancient human remains from the southern Levant has usually not included a synthetic bioarcheological

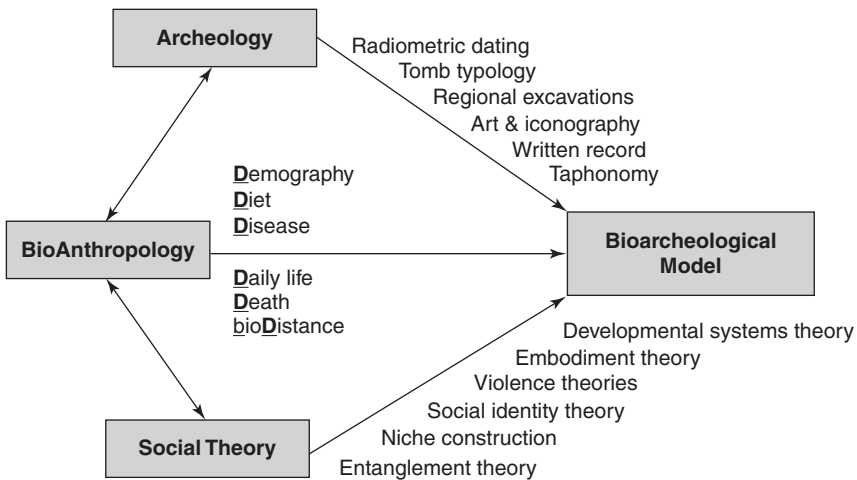


Figure 9.1 The bioarcheological model (constructed by the author).

approach. As Megan Perry¹⁹ pointed out, too often, descriptive accounts of the human remains have appeared as an appendix in Near Eastern site reports, in no way synthesized with the material culture. Indeed, there are a disturbing number of works that provide only passing mention of any human bones found, leaving the reader to wonder if the tomb/grave was built for pots, not people.²⁰

Childhood bioarcheology

Until recently, bioarcheology has generally considered children as incomplete, unformed adults. The terms ‘subadult’ and ‘nonadult’ are usually used in bioarcheology to refer to those under sixteen-to-eighteen years of age. Part of the reason for this is the lack of complete agreement regarding standardized cut-off ages for terms like infant, toddler, child, and so on. When considering children of the past, we have tended to use them as a proxy for overall population health, focusing on their morbidity and mortality as they relate to adults. Patrick Beauchensne and Sabrina Agarwal pointed out that this strips them ‘of agency and purpose.’²¹ There has also been a tendency to assume their physiological age as equivalent to how their communities viewed them, thus dictating expected behaviors and outcomes at fixed ages.²² Nicholas Kalogerus made the same observation for historians in his thesis on Byzantine education, reminding us of the danger of projecting modern meaning onto ancient systems that operated on a different organizational framework.²³

Young bone is admittedly complex, given rapid growth and development. Since childhood is defined by bone formation, as is repair to bone damage, it can be difficult to determine whether new bone is the result of age or pathology.²⁴ Thus, children are often referred to as ‘plastic,’ indicating the transient nature of bony changes. Plasticity also includes the recognition that gene expression can be highly influenced by ecological and social factors during accelerated growth, complicating interpretation. Fortunately, there has been a florescence of new work with infant and child remains as seen with a dedicated journal titled *Childhood in the Past*; several books published in just the past few years;²⁵ and, a slew of very recent articles, cited throughout this manuscript.

Children are unique in their dependence on others to survive, making them ‘simultaneously embodied, material, cognitive, intersectional, relational, and developmental.’²⁶ A human infant is born essentially helpless, more so than any other primate, and no other mammal takes as long to mature.²⁷ This lengthened dependency offers an unequaled capacity for learning, at the cost of prolonged vulnerability.²⁸ The advantages for the genus *Homo* have outweighed the disadvantages, as our reproductive success has allowed us to expand across the globe over the past two million years.²⁹

That said, childhood is a dangerous time, with a five-times-higher mortality rate between ages one and five years than in adulthood.³⁰ It is even more

dire for infants, where 'the first few days after birth constitute the most critical time in a perinate's life after the first trimester.'³¹ From years five to fifteen, mortality drops to twice that of adults. For these reasons, early childhood has been referred to as a bottleneck of human adaptability, important to our understanding of past and present population health.³²

Incidents in youth, even 'insults *in utero*,' can have lifelong effects on an individual physiologically.³³ Chris Kuzawa demonstrated that severe difficulties suffered by a grandmother (e.g., famine, war) can be seen physiologically even two generations later.³⁴ Thus, bioarcheology has begun to utilize a life course approach to assess health at a specific age, as well as the 'fluidity of identity' during an individual's lifetime.³⁵ This developmental origins of health and disease (DOHaD) approach looks at how factors impacting the mother result in long-term health consequences for fetal and child development in the form of increased risk for disease and early death. Rebecca L. Gowland mused that the effects of multi-generation epigenetic impacts make one question whether conception truly marks the start of an individual's life course.³⁶

Childhood is a physiological phase for our genus,³⁷ but how it is defined socially significantly shapes the individual biologically. Its duration and impact are influenced by environmental and cultural constraints. Status, gender, ethnicity, social roles, and the environment all sculpt growth and development. Thus, to study children of the past, one must consider not only their genetic susceptibility to disease and death, but the interconnected aspects of their social and natural environments as well.³⁸ The integration of life course analysis and DOHaD theory provides a holistic outlook for childhood bioarcheology, de-emphasizing an adult-centric approach to the study of human adaptation, incorporating the most sensitive barometer of a group's success: its children.

Byzantine St Stephen's monastery

The Byzantine remnants of St Stephen's monastery are located approximately 250 meters north of the Damascus gate, east of Nabulus road, adjacent to the Garden Tomb (Figure 9.2). The Piacenza Pilgrim referred to it as 'a bow shot' from the city walls.³⁹ It was constructed with the endowment of Empress Eudocia between 431 and 438 CE.⁴⁰ Built to house the relics of the first Christian martyr Stephen, the walled monastic compound was the largest church structure in or around Jerusalem for almost a century, larger even than the precincts of the Golgotha complex.⁴¹ Cyril of Scythopolis called it a 'diocese' due to its size, while Evagrius Scholasticus described the site as 'a vast temenos, remarkable for its proportions and for its beauty.'⁴² According to Cyril, the grounds were large enough to host the 10,000 monks⁴³ who gathered for the monophosite revolt of 516 CE.⁴⁴ The site appears in numerous writings of the period due to its affiliation with Stephen, significant imperial patronage, size, beauty, and location along a thoroughfare of pilgrimage.⁴⁵

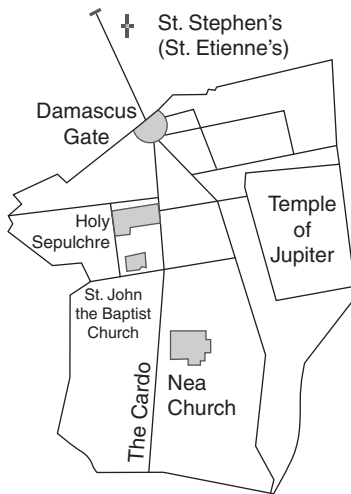


Figure 9.2 Map of Byzantine Jerusalem showing the location of St Stephen's monastery.

Several Byzantine-style tombs and two large crypt complexes have been found at the site; the current study focuses on remains from Repository 6,⁴⁶ one recess in the largest crypt on the grounds (Figure 9.3). Carved from the limestone caves beneath St Stephen's during the Iron Age (eighth to seventh century BCE), they were reused during the Byzantine period to inter the monastery's dead.⁴⁷ The human skeletal remains from Repository 6 originated from the Byzantine period, as evidenced through radiocarbon dating,⁴⁸ chronological typology of 202 artifacts commingled with the bones,⁴⁹ Greek inscriptions found in association with the tomb complex,⁵⁰ and the large above-ground monastic complex indicative of Byzantine occupation of the site.⁵¹ It is worth noting that, given the topic of this chapter, no artifacts related to children were found mixed with the bones or around the monastery grounds.⁵²

Today a Dominican monastery, the Couvent St-Étienne and its associated L'École Biblique et Archéologique Française sit atop the Byzantine site. The Dominican order purchased the property in the mid-1880s because they believed it to be the location of Eudocia's monastery to Stephen (Lagrange and Olivier, 1894).⁵³ As the French School for Biblical Archaeology, they excavated the grounds as they built the modern-day school and monastery, uncovering mosaics, the crypts, inscriptions, cisterns, graves, and the foundations for the Byzantine basilica.⁵⁴

When this archeological information is coupled with a rich textual record for the site and region, and our twenty years of data from the skeletal remains, the ability to frame a series of testable hypotheses about life in this large urban monastery becomes possible. To date, we have explored

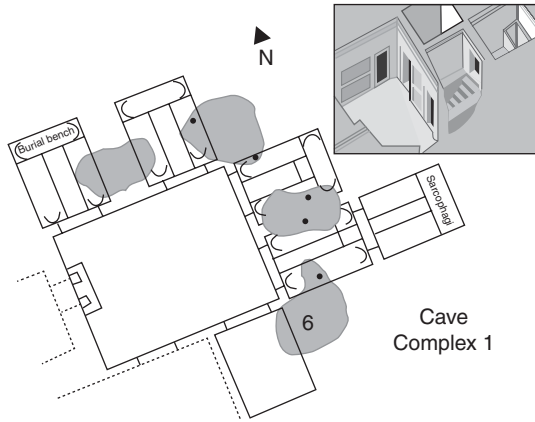


Figure 9.3 Cave Complex 1 showing Repository 6, and 3D cutaway of complex (image compiled and adapted from Barkay and Kloner, 1986, by author).

aspects of Byzantine pilgrimage,⁵⁵ diet,⁵⁶ disease,⁵⁷ material culture,⁵⁸ and the children of St Stephen's.⁵⁹ Social theory related to embodiment, structural violence, practice theory, and entanglement have helped us explore nuanced issues beyond the realm of skeletal biology alone, such as devotional gestures associated with prayer, adherence to monastic ideals related to diet, stoicism linked with pious suffering, and the impact of pilgrimage on Byzantine community composition.

The study collection

The skeletal and dental fragments from Repository 6 were commingled, making it difficult to reconstruct complete bones or individuals. The quality of preservation was good, but the commingled nature of the collection placed certain restrictions on the types of reconstructions possible. Mixed and fragmented collections compel a holistic approach, require broader questions about human adaptability, force the use of multiple morbidity and mortality indicators, demand interdisciplinarity, and catalyze the development of new indicators for age and sex.⁶⁰ Maintaining a realistic picture of what can be addressed using fragmentary and mixed skeletal remains is of paramount importance; nevertheless, inclusion of these overlooked assemblages has allowed a fuller understanding of ancient Levantine lifeways than was possible using discrete burials alone.⁶¹

The 'osteological paradox' requires that we keep the complexities of assessing past health, frailty, stress, and fertility in mind when studying bioarcheological collections.⁶² This paradox states that there are conflicting variables represented by a skeletal assemblage, namely that: a) we do not

know underlying group vulnerabilities or their causes (i.e., time differences, population subgroups, small environmental shifts); b) the bones are from those who died, we cannot analyze their living counterparts in tandem; c) the burial assemblage does not necessarily reflect the population from which it drew if there were differential burial practices by age, sex, status, etc. and/or if there was movement from the group (e.g., war, marriage); and, d) bone pathologies take time to form, thus those who manifest them lived with the disease for some time, while those who succumbed quickly show no evidence of illness.

Such limitations are magnified for mixed and fragmented collection. Calculating group patterns of ancient morbidity and mortality, employing techniques to limit duplication of results, careful attention to reduce interobserver error, and a willingness to apply new methods as they become available, are all mechanisms that enhance 'scrutiny of the contextual actors underlying an archeological skeletal series.'⁶³ As frustrating as it can be at times, one must remain cognizant of the limitations imposed by commingled remains.

In this way, we have been able to draw several conclusions about the adult segment of the Byzantine St Stephen's collection based upon a wealth of studies, most reproduced via independent measures over the years. The vast majority of the adult bones represent robust men, who stood about 5'4" to 5'6" tall and lived on average into their forties.⁶⁴ Despite restrictions on the consumption of meat attested to in monastic literature, we have shown that animal protein made up an important part of their diets.⁶⁵ We have demonstrated that many of those interred in Repository 6 were not local to Jerusalem.⁶⁶ Surveys of pathological lesions have demonstrated that this was a remarkably healthy group of men, with no signs of cancerous lesions of the bone, very few broken bones, a very low incidence of dental pathologies, few congenital bone defects, little bony evidence of infectious disease, and no sign of inflammatory lesions.⁶⁷

The Minimum Number of Individuals (MNI) estimate for this collection is 109 adults and 58 children. It is important to remember that MNI is the smallest possible number of people present, usually a gross underestimate of the actual assemblage size. Christopher Knüsel and John Robb.⁶⁸ warned that despite 'pressures from the site director, the MNI should never be interpreted as "how many people were deposited at the site".' Utilizing a more sensitive estimate called the Most Likely Number of Individuals (MLNI), we calculated an adult component near 250 individuals.⁶⁹ Unfortunately, the skeletal elements needed for MLNI among the children are not present; most had not yet ossified in their young bodies.

The bones of adults and children were mixed together in the crypt, due to burial practices, looting, and the tendency for small bones to settle. It is likely that remains were added to crypt over time as the burial benches above were needed. When the front of the crypt filled up, bones had to be pushed to the back of the repository to make room for new additions. We know that the

tombs were looted at least once, as Louie Hugues Vincent and Félix-Marie Abel⁷⁰ noted fine glass and oil lamps mixed among the human remains listed in the original excavation notes. We only found fragments,⁷¹ and when we looked for comparative examples, we repeatedly found them among the private Schloessinger Collection from 'the Dominican tombs.'⁷²

This chapter will focus on the remains of infants and children in the St Stephen's collection. I will discuss our findings from the children themselves, and address their potential relationship of the monastery as gleaned from historical records of the region and period.

Biological analysis of the St Stephen's children

The written record for St Stephen's is considerable; however, no mention of the children has yet been found, nor has a typikon for the Byzantine community.⁷³ However, pilgrimage and liturgical records, art and iconography, and legal and medical documents from the period and region have all contributed to our understanding of the cultural context, and so to the biocultural setting for this site.⁷⁴ Excavations of hundreds of Palestinian monasteries, urban settings throughout the Byzantine East, the grounds of Eudocia's monastery itself, grave goods found among the bones, plus the use of assorted dating methods have added needed material components to the bioarcheological model.⁷⁵

Analysis of the human remains from St Stephen's follows the aforementioned 6 Ds of bioarcheology. Age and sex profiles for the group, analysis of diet and weaning, a survey of pathological lesions, analysis of muscle and ligament attachments associated with daily activities, the unique burial setting, and assessment of multiple genetic indicators have provided important information to build a bioarcheological model of the children buried at the monastery.

Demography

Demographic reconstruction is complicated by commingling since multiple indicators from the same bone and/or individual are often not available. This does not, however, preclude the ability to address who is represented when wider demographic categories and group patterns are used.

Age determination: Numerous features are available for age determination in children, permitting considerable accuracy while the skeleton and teeth are growing. Dental eruption is one of the best measures of age in the young, since tooth formation is largely under genetic control.⁷⁶ Length and robusticity of the long bones of the arms and legs have also been used, although bone growth is under greater environmental influence. Fusion of the growth plates along the margins of bones occurs during adolescence, and provides another tool for age estimation; epiphyseal union varies by individual but the range of ages is well documented for humans.⁷⁷

Each method utilized (dental eruption patterns; metric analyses of the radius, ulna, humerus, femur, and tibia; radiography of epiphyseal scars on the distal radius) demonstrated two interesting patterns. First, most of the bones in the assemblage are from children under ten years of age. Indeed, the majority are infants. As discussed above, this is not surprising given the notably higher morbidity and mortality experienced by children under five years old. A peak around one-to-three years is often associated with a dietary shift from mother's milk to adult foods, as will be discussed in the **Diet** section.

Rebecca Mayus⁷⁸ attempted microscopic examination of bone histology for age estimation, known to be a highly accurate age indicator.⁷⁹ Unfortunately post-mortem mold intrusions in the bone microstructure precluded this analysis using rib, radius, and even femur samples. Some structures can be seen beneath the mold (Figure 9.4); however, the bone was too friable to allow further grinding of the thin-sections for accurate assessment. As methods for clearing mold improve, we will attempt additional analyses.

Sex determination: Distinguishing males from females prior to the onset of puberty is an arduous task since most secondary sexual characteristics of the skeleton develop when adolescent soft tissue changes take place.⁸⁰ The

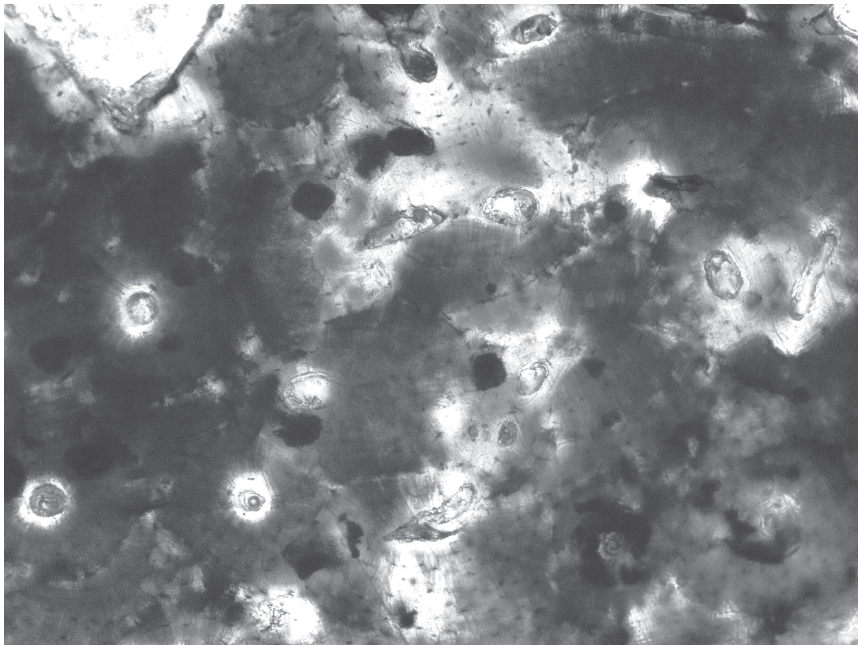


Figure 9.4 Thin-section (200 μ) of rib showing fungal intrusions (dark and gray areas), with some microstructure visible but not score-able (used with permission by Rebecca Mayus).

innominate and skull provide the best sites for sex determination, and moderate success was found with a few methods employing some of the first sexually dimorphic traits to appear in bone.

Susan Loth and Maciej Henneberg⁸¹ proposed use of the mandible, noting that adult chin shape is present by age six. They claimed the squarer male and more rounded female jawline was visible with ~80% accuracy. Subsequent studies found lower accuracies at ~77%⁸² and 64%⁸³ using shape of the mandibular arcade, and Arianne Kemkes-Grottenthaler and coworkers reported that tooth loss considerably altered precision.⁸⁴ Holger Schutkowski reported that greater gonial eversion (mandibular flaring) identified young males with ~80% accuracy.⁸⁵ They also found a 69% overall accuracy for both sexes, while Daniel Franklin and co-workers reported no statistically significant difference by sex for the trait.⁸⁶ Using these and other methods, we found several female children in the collection. We will continue to add additional traits as they are developed, given the questions raised about these two indicators.

The site of articulation of the *os coxa* (innominate) with the sacrum, known as the auricular surface, was analyzed for elevation of the articular face.⁸⁷ Diane Mittler and I noted 85% accuracy for individuals aged ten and above, using a Sudanese mummy collection of known sex (with preserved soft tissue confirmation).⁸⁸ Using this method and arch criteria (area around the greater sciatic notch and auricular surface),⁸⁹ we found females in the assemblage.

Our analyses did not attempt to quantify the number of females using these morphological traits, given the commingled and fragmented nature of the collection. We simply noted their likely presence, based on multiple identification methods. In addition to the tests above, we attempted ancient DNA (aDNA) analysis of ten samples. All specimens were radiocarbon dated to ensure they were from the Byzantine occupation. Unfortunately, the fungal intrusions noted with bone histology aging proved problematic for amplifying the nuclear DNA needed for sex determination (Figure 9.5). Some samples did perform better than others, thus future analyses using next-generation sequencing technologies that can analyze short fragments will be tried in the future.⁹⁰

Diet reconstruction

Stable isotope composition of bone was utilized to assess children's diet associated with a shift from breast milk to solid food. Trace element analysis of bone permitted subsequent independent verification of this dietary shift. Isotopic values in bone, enamel, and dentin from the same individuals allowed us to monitor dietary change over the life course from infancy to adulthood in a small sample of St Stephen's residents.

Weaning: Reducing the intake of human breast milk can be a difficult transition for infants, as it diminishes important immunoglobulins and lymphocytes from the adult, making the child more dependent on their own immature

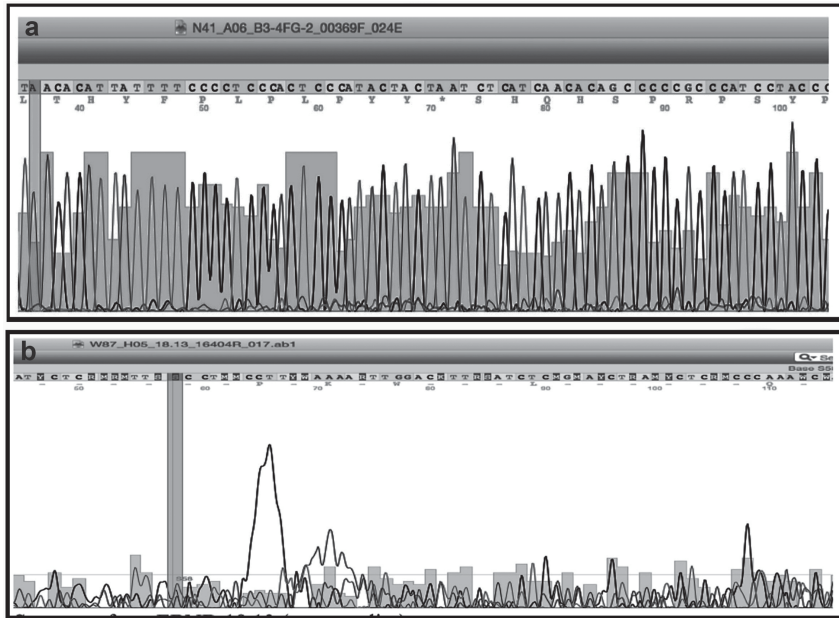


Figure 9.5 Sequence electropherograms from a high-quality aDNA sample (top), and specimen EBND 18.13 from St Stephen's monastery (bottom) (used with permission of Dr. Frankie Pack, University of Tennessee Molecular Anthropology Laboratories).

immune system and, subsequently, more susceptible to disease.⁹¹ Infants and mothers share comparable nitrogen values at birth, that change during breastfeeding because milk has a higher nitrogen isotope ($\delta^{15}\text{N}$) value.⁹² The sharp peak in infant $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ levels decreases as weaning begins and new foods are introduced because most adult foods have lower nitrogen values.⁹³ Figure 9.6 illustrates the $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ values in bone for forty-nine children from St Stephen's.⁹⁴

With the onset of breastfeeding, infants buried at St Stephen's saw a $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ peak associated with breast milk consumption only, from about six months to a year of age. Breast milk continued to supplement the diet until age two-to-three years, when complete weaning occurred. A similar pattern of enrichment was seen for stable carbon isotope ($\delta^{13}\text{C}$), with an initial peak at six months to one year old, signifying exclusive breastfeeding followed by a decline as weaning ceased at two-to-three years of age. Thus, carbon and nitrogen isotopes both provide a means to delineate the duration of breast feeding, the timing and extent of weaning, and the weanling diet.⁹⁵

Trace element analysis of strontium (Sr) and calcium (Ca) in bone provided another monitor of breastfeeding duration.⁹⁶ There is little Sr/Ca in human milk, and consequently, in the bones of breastfeeding babies. For the

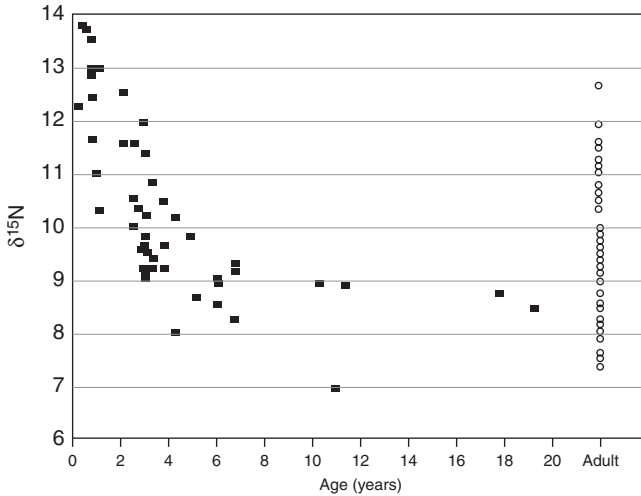


Figure 9.6 $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ values for forty-nine children by age from Byzantine St Stephen's monastery.

St Stephen's children, Sr/Ca values rose from six months to two years old, then leveled off at around age three (Figure 9.7). The ability to discriminate between Sr and Ca by the digestive track of young children causes them to exhibit higher Sr/Ca ratios with the commencement of weaning. As the juvenile matures and solid food increases, the ratio increases.⁹⁷ Bone strontium content tends to rise gradually until young adulthood, then remains largely unchanged.⁹⁸

This research illustrates the compatibility of two methodologies in determining weaning patterns at Byzantine St Stephen's monastery. Stable nitrogen and carbon isotope ratios demonstrated the start of weaning at six months to one year, ending completely by two-to-three years of age. This was reinforced by Sr/Ca ratios, though it extended the process to the end of that range at three years old.

Life course analysis of diet: stable isotope ratios of $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ and $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ in multiple tissues from the same individual permits analysis of diet across several age ranges. This is not easy to accomplish with commingled collections since complete bones are rarely refitted. However, we had nine adult mandible portions with intact molars, allowing us assess bone collagen, bone apatite, and enamel apatite—each tissue encapsulating a different age of formation.⁹⁹ Our multi-tissue isotopic perspective compared enamel carbonate ($\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{ap}}$) values from the first (M1) and third (M3) permanent molars, with collagen ($\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{co}}$) and apatite ($\delta^{15}\text{N}$) assessed from mandibular bone. Enamel captures isotopic values from childhood during tooth formation and does not turn over. Adult teeth are formed during infancy and early childhood, thus we overcome the

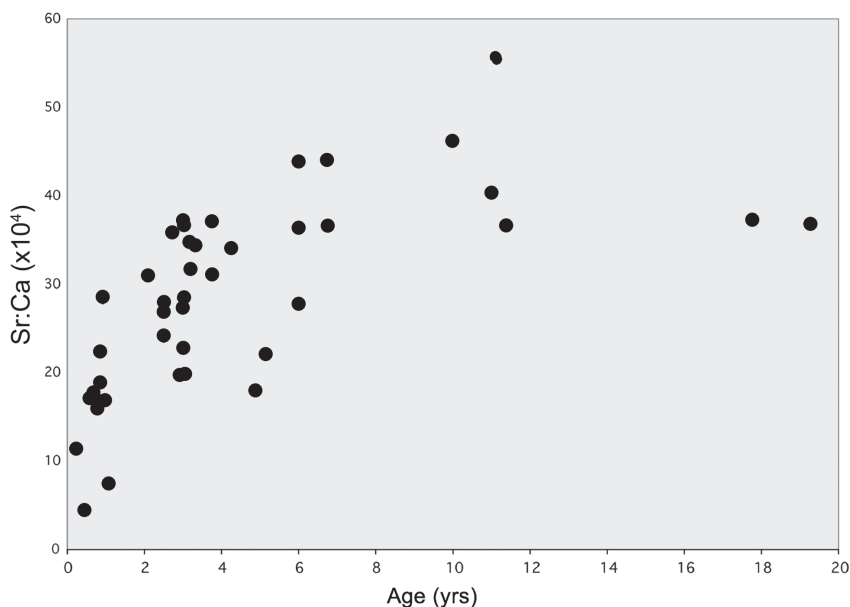


Figure 9.7 Age profile of Sr/Ca ($\times 10^4$) for the Byzantine St Stephen's children.

problem of selective mortality since these individuals clearly lived through the weaning process.¹⁰⁰ Bone collagen and apatite, on the other hand, represent the last ten years of a person's life since these tissues undergo regular replacement while alive.¹⁰¹ Looking at different points in the life cycle provides a glimpse of dietary change over time, in a dynamic manner not possible when analyzing tooth or bone alone. The mandible affords this temporal perspective given the adjacency of bone and teeth.

With the exception of a single outlier, few changes were observed between M1 and M3 $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{ap}}$ values (Figure 9.8). These ratios were indicative of the consumption of isotopically similar, largely C3-based foods (e.g., wheat, olives, most fruits and vegetables) during 0–3.5 years (M1) and 7.5–15.5 years of age (M3). The $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{ap}}$ decrease with age may reflect a dietary shift from breast milk and more ^{13}C -enriched weanling foods (evidenced in the M1 results), to less enriched solid foods (seen in the M3 values).

While the identification of variation between individual life histories is important, the $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{ap}}$ ratios of EBND 9.428 (the outlier in Figure 9.8) go beyond expected local variability, and instead suggest a non-local geographical origin for this adult male. Evidence of an immigrant interred at St Stephen's is not surprising given historical accounts of pilgrimage¹⁰² and additional biological markers.¹⁰³

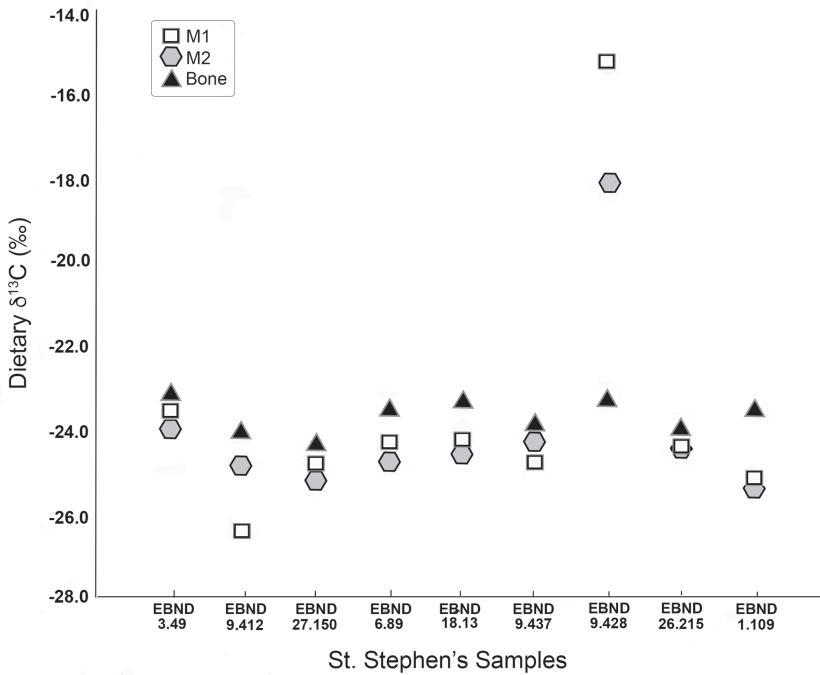


Figure 9.8 $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ and $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ ratios for three skeletal tissues sampled from nine adults interred at St Stephen's monastery.

Disease

Much like the adult segment of the assemblage, there are few paleopathological cases among the children. We found no inflammatory or neoplastic (cancerous) defects, and the only evidence of infection was in the form of carious lesions of dental enamel. There is evidence of possible childhood trauma in the form of well-healed fractures on two radii of young adults (at time of death) meaning the breaks may have happened during their teenage years; however, it is not possible to pinpoint length of healing with any real specificity. Metabolic lesions in the form of generalized physiological stress indicators, and an individual with a clear congenital (birth) defect, form the only variable paleopathological categories of note indicative of childhood health.

Generalized stress indicators: a common pathology seen in adult teeth, but a vestige of childhood stress, is the linear enamel hypoplasia (LEH). The etiology is complex and we are not able to definitively pinpoint the specific physiological stress(es) that result in diminished tissue formation,¹⁰⁴ but LEHs are sensitive markers of impaired development (Figure 9.9).

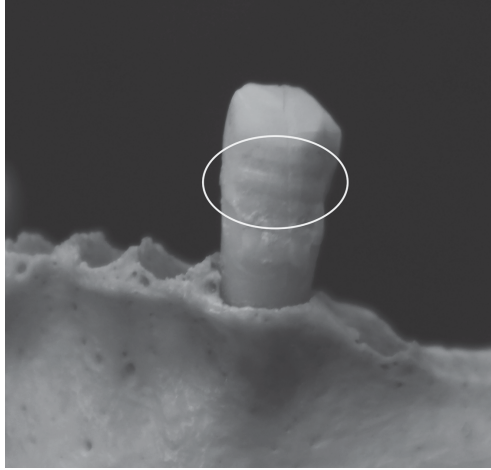


Figure 9.9 Three clear linear enamel hypoplasias visible on a mandibular molar. Hypoplastic activity can be seen on several other teeth as well (photo by author).

Permanent teeth begin to form *in utero*, thus ‘recording’ in the adult dentition the physiological insults of the first seven years of life. During crown development, ameloblasts (enamel-forming cells) move forward from the tip of the tooth, depositing enamel matrix. During severe stress, amelogenesis is decreased or stopped for the duration of the insult, producing a band of depressed enamel thickness.¹⁰⁵ As mentioned earlier, these adults survived the childhood stressors that produced the LEHs. In this study, LEHs were scored for the mandibular canines and maxillary central incisors, the two teeth most sensitive to hypoplastic activity. Number of hypoplasias by tooth and by side were recorded, with the highest numbers found on the left mandibular canine and the right central incisor (Table 9.1). These were then used to represent tooth type to avoid duplicating individuals. Eighty-nine percent (25/28) of the lower-left canines and 75% (15/20) of the upper-central incisors had at least one hypoplasia.

Distance of all LEHs from the cemento-enamel junction (where enamel and tooth root come together) were measured to determine the approximate age of appearance for each LEH. Nearly 45% for both tooth types peaked in frequency between 9 months and 1.5 years of age, an age range consistent with the weaning profiles developed from the bone chemistry data. Again, these are the people who made a successful dietary transition.¹⁰⁶

We looked for hypoplasias on the deciduous dentition using the mandibular canines, maxillary central incisors, and the maxillary lateral incisors. We did not find any hypoplasias on the deciduous teeth, but this was not unexpected, as those with enamel defects of the ‘milk teeth’ died in childhood.

A relatively new method of serially sampling the tissue underlying enamel, known as dentin, provides a nuanced means to look at infant and childhood

Table 9.1 Number of hypoplasia by side and tooth type for adults at Byzantine St Stephen's

Tooth	n	Hypoplasias per tooth							Total hypo- plasias	
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6		
Canine										
Left	28	10.7% (3)	21.4% (6)	28.6% (8)	21.4% (6)	7.1% (2)	7.1% (2)	3.6% (1)	59	
Right	16	6.3% (1)	56.2% (9)	18.7% (3)	18.7% (3)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	24	
Central incisor										
Left	13	31.7% (4)	7.7% (1)	15.4% (2)	15.4% (2)	15.4% (2)	7.7% (1)	7.7% (1)	21	
Right	20	25.0% (5)	15.0% (3)	25.0% (5)	10.0% (2)	20.0% (4)	0% (0)	5.0% (1)	41	

health using stable carbon and nitrogen isotopes during different growth phases of the tooth (and thus minute age intervals). By incremental sampling of dentin before, during, and after the formation of an LEH, another means to assess an individual life course becomes available using stable isotope analysis. This method uses multiple samples from each individual tooth, making it well-suited for commingled collections. Over the coming year we will be starting this analysis for the St Stephen's collection.

Congenital defects: a very severe case of tarsal coalition was discovered during the first year of excavation, with several tarsals and metatarsals fused together in a solid mass (Figure 9.10). The CT scan (lower image) shows an interior view of the foot, illustrating the lack of distinction between the tarsal bones. Postmortem damage to the specimen is evident, therefore it is difficult to know whether even more foot bones were involved.

Tarsal coalitions, as the name suggests, arise from a developmental error or injury during gestation where the bones fail to separate.¹⁰⁷ We have three examples from the St Stephen's collection—two are mild cases with a single tarsal and metatarsal fused together, often seen clinically by accident when other imaging tests are ordered.¹⁰⁸ Specimen EBND 6.122, however, is an extraordinary example, the first reported for the ancient Near East, and worse than any case found to date in published clinical, archeological, or paleoanthropological literature.¹⁰⁹

In each instance, the bones are from adults; nevertheless, this was an ailment that affected the individual throughout childhood as well. This disorder would



Figure 9.10 Photo, superior view of the exterior of the fused foot showing the talus, calcaneus, navicular, cuboid, cuneiforms, and metatarsals I-III fused together (upper); and, CT scan (lower), medial view, illustrating the lack of differentiation of the tarsals (EBND 6.122) (*photo and CT scan by the author*).

have impeded normal walking by severely limiting the range of motion of the foot in all directions, preventing the normal toe off-heel strike cycle of bipedal locomotion. Unfortunately, the ends of the metatarsals were abraded post-mortem, so it was not possible to assess the degenerative osteoarthritic damage that was most assuredly present.¹¹⁰ A limited range of motion, flat-footedness, and pain very likely affected this person throughout life.¹¹¹

Daily activity patterns

The most widespread and defining pathology of the adult remains is the degenerative change at the joints and enthesopathies (points where muscle tendons attach to bone) associated with deep flexion of the knees, ankles, and toes.¹¹² With the aid of theologians, we found that multiple genuflections per day (numbering in the hundreds) were the likely cause of these excessive pathologies.¹¹³ Given their severity even in men in their mid-twenties, we looked for responses on the same skeletal sites in the children's bones.

The patella, distal femur, and calcaneus were analyzed because they show the most marked degenerative changes in the adults related to this



Figure 9.11 Examples of the distal femur traits in adults (to show full expression) associated with deep flexion of the knee. They are from left to right: Charles' facet, Martin's facet, an osteochondritic imprint, and a tibial imprint (*photos by author*).

daily activity. For the patella, marginal lipping, exterior surface osteophyte (bony outgrowth) formation, sclerotic buildup (areas of unusual thickness), and eburnation (bone on bone rubbing) were scored. We found no evidence of these lesions on the three children's patella in the collection. Charles' facets,¹¹⁴ Martin's facets,¹¹⁵ osteochondritic imprints,¹¹⁶ and tibial imprints¹¹⁷ were examined for forty-seven femora (Figure 9.11). Two late teens (sixteen-to-eighteen years) manifested slight features, one with a possible osteochondritic imprint (EBND 11.206), one with a marked Charles' facet (EBND 6.264). For the forty-one calcanei in the sample, evidence of articular surface eburnation, lipping at the sites of attachment for the Achille's tendon (back of the heel) and plantar fascia (bottom of the heel) were scored as well. One calcaneus showed eburnation on the talar surface, indicating a relatively advanced degree of degeneration (EBND 5.391). As with the femoral traits, this was on a late teen. We have no way to determine if this heel bone was associated with either distal femur; however, they do match in size, coloration, and advanced degree of epiphyseal fusion.

It is not surprising that we found only cursory evidence of daily activities in the vast majority of children. The rapid growth and development of their bone makes detection of pathologies hard to assess—if they even have time to form in the first place, they are quickly overwhelmed by swift bone remodeling.

Death

This category recognizes that how a person is treated in death may reveal how they were viewed in life. Beyond hygiene, burials provide a view of those performing the rituals. Determining what death meant, and to whom, can reveal aspects of status, gender, politics, inequity, and relatedness, although considerable care must be taken to not project modern values on ancient practices.¹¹⁸ The demography, diet, disease, daily actives, and degree of relatedness of those interred, coupled with tomb types, grave goods, and

post-mortem handling of the dead, may thus provide important information about who the buried children were in relation to St Stephen's monastery.

Around the grounds of the modern-day Dominican monastery are numerous graves dating to the Byzantine period. The limestone in this portion of Jerusalem made it ideal for carving tombs, thus it acts as a large necropolis representing the scope of human habitation in the region. The two Iron Age crypt complexes were likely carved from preexisting caves, given their size.

According to Gabriel Barkay and Amos Kloner, this was a burial complex for a wealthy Jewish family, with several ornate features demonstrating their affluence.¹¹⁹ At the entryway is a step that held a double door, for which the hinge sockets are still visible. They observed that such doorways were usually found in palace throne rooms of the period (e.g., Nimrud, Gezer, Meggido, Nineveh). The walls of the large, main room were decorated with slightly recessed rectangular panels that may have mimicked the cedar paneling in Judean and Israelite palaces. There is also a double cornice carved in the rock around the top of the walls, like that of the Tomb of the Royal Steward in the Silwan Valley. Barkay examined the walls of the main room under magnification and found no chisel marks, indicating they were polished once the complex was hewn. All of these features connote royal architecture during the Iron Age. The six burial chambers leading off of the main room are reached through six-foot openings with recessed areas around the frame. The rooms have multiple burial benches carved from rock, each with a lip along the edge, a large hole towards the back, and at least one horseshoe-shaped headrest. Underneath one of usually three benches per room is a large repository for bones. In the room from which we recovered the bones, there are steps up to a second chamber that held large stone sarcophagi hewn from the cave walls with ledges to hold stone slabs. Barkay and Kloner argued that these held 'honored dead' that they later stated may have belonged to the last of the Davidic Kings.¹²⁰

I provided the above description to contrast it with the much simpler Byzantine-period tombs found around the grounds. There are several along the margins of the large cistern in front of the basilica, and one next to a detailed mosaic just outside the church. It is quite likely there are many more around the grounds of the complex. The Byzantine-style rock-cut tombs consist of a single aisleway, with one burial trough to each side, several with stepped entrances.¹²¹ A future project will involve a systematic exploration of the area for more tombs.

Given the robusticity and exceptional health of the adult men in the St Stephen's collection, historical accounts of the monastery's wealth, the ornate nature of the ancient tomb complex that was repurposed by the Byzantine inhabitants, the Greek inscriptions found in the tombs, and the richness of the Schloessinger Collection,¹²² I think this burial location at Eudocia's monastery was for venerated individuals. Admittedly, the most 'important' remains are said to be buried just under the entranceway into the church—the purported bones of St Stephen, Eudocia, and her granddaughter of the same name.¹²³

The presence of the children in these tombs, and mixed among the remains of adult males who likely made up the monastic community at St Stephen's, may indicate their importance to the community.

bioDistance

This brings us to the final **D** of bioarcheology, the degree of relatedness of the individuals buried in the tomb. Population movement 'has continually reshaped the economic, ethnic, and political dynamics'¹²⁴ of the past, resulting from social disruption, migrating food sources, environmental change, wanderlust, piety, and a host of other causes. Jane Buikstra, Susan Frankenberg, and Lyle Konigsberg defined biodistance as the hetero-/homogeneity of groups separated by place and time.¹²⁵ Pilgrimage to holy sites was a major cultural phenomenon, according to writings of the period, that reached a zenith during the Byzantine period in Jerusalem.¹²⁶ Many of those pilgrims then stayed in Jerusalem to join monasteries.¹²⁷ Thus we would expect some degree of heterogeneity among those buried in the tomb.

For the adults, that is what we found.¹²⁸ It appears that the majority of the men came from the wider Near Eastern gene pool based on genetic traits seen in the teeth and crania, but this encompassed a large area that stretched into north Africa, up into Turkey, and west to the Saudi peninsula. Using stable strontium (Sr) and oxygen (O) isotopes, we found that many of the men were not from the Jerusalem area. It is worth noting that such chemical analysis provides a conservative estimate of heterogeneity, since they show only who lived in areas similar to versus different from the region in question. However, concentrations of Sr and O in groundwater can be similar in widely different areas, so it is possible that some of the individuals with comparable stable isotope values were actual from far-flung locations that happened to have similar groundwater profiles.¹²⁹

The question of interest to this chapter is, what can we say about the similarity of features in the children? Many studies have surveyed genetically produced dental and skeletal anomalies in isolated populations to determine the degree of relatedness among members.¹³⁰ While such studies cannot delimit the specific geographic origin of inhabitants, they can determine the degree of heterogeneity within a group. Morphological factors such as non-metric traits of the cranium and teeth, dental metrics, and stable isotope analysis of strontium ($^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$), oxygen ($\delta^{18}\text{O}$), and carbon ($\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{ap(VPDB)}}$) have been used for such analyses.¹³¹ The growing sophistication of DNA methods has added another powerful tool for biodistance investigations. We have applied many of these to study the homogeneity of the children; I will highlight a few below. Dental morphology: In a study of monozygotic twins, Townsend and coworkers¹³² demonstrated the heritability of several dental features called nonmetric or discrete traits. They are anomalies in tooth formation that provide no selective advantage or disadvantage to an individual, thus when they appear they are often passed on to succeeding generations. Numerous studies

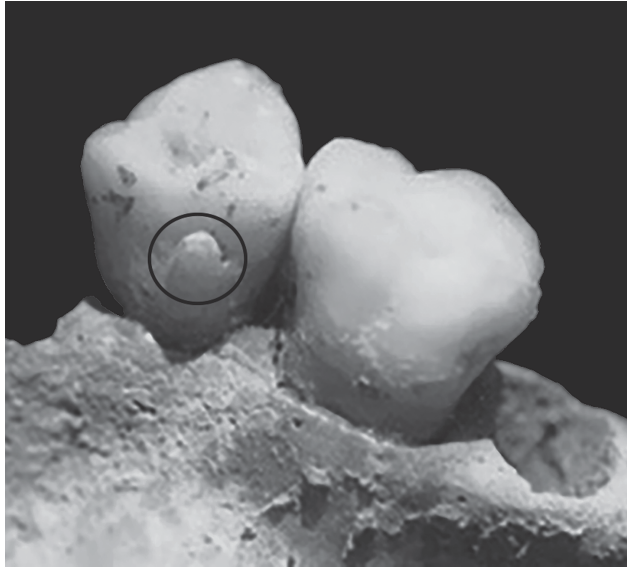


Figure 9.12 Nonmetric traits showing different stages of a Carabelli's cusp (*photos by author*).

have shown that the presence or absence of these dental traits are under considerable genetic control, impacted little if at all by environmental or social constraints on an individual's biology. Many also do not vary by sex.¹³³

We looked at a sample of 104 child and 200 adult teeth for the presence/absence of five common dental traits, scored using the Arizona State University Dental Anthropology System of dental plaques demonstrating graded changes for each trait.¹³⁴ Additional plaques were developed by Kazuro Hannihara and Albert Dahlberg for the deciduous teeth. Traits included shovel-shaped incisors, and Carabelli's cusp, protostylid, hypocone, and cusp 7 of the second deciduous and first permanent molars (Figure 9.12). Particular traits have been linked to different geographic regions around the world, thus analyses of these traits help identify both the degree of similarity or difference of the individuals in the test group, and can be useful for determining something about broad gene group affiliation, these have been divided into five regions: the Sino-Americans, sub-Sahara Africa, Western Eurasia, the Sunda-Pacific, and the Sahul-Pacific. Shovel-shaped incisors, for example, are most commonly found in East Asian populations.¹³⁵

The ancient Near East was a thoroughfare of peoples moving through the natural geologic corridor formed by the Great Rift Valley, extending from Africa to Syria. Not surprisingly, this has created a considerable opportunity for gene flow since our first ancestors walked out of Africa. The dental traits from the children of St Stephen's showed affiliations with both Western

Eurasia and Sub-Saharan Africa geographic regions. And there was no statistically significant difference ($p \leq 0.05$) between the occurrence of these features with the adults in the St Stephen's collection.¹³⁶ Based on these data, there is no evidence to suggest that the adults and juveniles were from two distinct biological groups. When combined with demographic and disease patterns for the community, a circumstantial case can be made for the theory that these children were from the surrounding community, buried near the bones of venerated individuals.

Ancient DNA: several attempts were made to use aDNA to assess genetic lineage in both the adults and children. This requires sequencing mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA), which does not have the preservation demands needed for the nuclear DNA isolation mentioned with sex determination. Alison French and Fredericka Kaestle at Indiana University's Ancient DNA Laboratory of Molecular Anthropology looked at a large number of innominate portions, and were the first to note problems associated with fungal intrusions. As mentioned in the **Demography** portion, Frankie Pack and Graciela S. Cabana at the University of Tennessee Molecular Anthropology Laboratories could not extract quality DNA for either the nuclear or mtDNA analyses. We will have to wait for methods to improve (and come down in price) to attempt this again. Fortunately, this is a more feasible possibility in the near future than sex determination using aDNA.

Bioarcheology summary

Analysis of the children's bones provided important evidence to assess their position vis-à-vis the monastery. We know that the remains date to the Byzantine period, and given the demographics of the adult segment of the assemblage, the remains in Cave Complex 1, Repository 6 were likely inhabitants of Eudocia's monastery to St Stephen.

The children buried with the monks ranged in age from seven months *in utero* to sixteen-to-eighteen years of age. Most died before age ten, with a peak mortality in one-to-three years old. There is evidence that there were at least a few girls among the children, although given the commingled nature of the collection, we cannot provide an estimate of the number. Dietary analysis showed us that most died during weaning, not surprising given the difficulties associated with that dietary transition. Assessment of diet among those who survived the weaning phase (adults), multi-tissue analysis that captured different ages in the life course showed little change in diet composition although did provide a potential glimpse of variation in weaning practices. One outlier among the group demonstrated considerable dietary change from childhood to the last ten years of their life, a likely indication that he was a pilgrim to Jerusalem.

None of the deciduous teeth in the collection exhibited LEH, while virtually all of the adults suffered physiological stress in childhood, manifest in

enamel defects formed during the first seven years of life. Nearly all had evidence of the weaning transition at one-to-three years of age, 10–15% had five to six hypoplasias per tooth showing considerable illness during childhood. Virtually no evidence of disease was otherwise noted among the children, but the rapid turnover of bone in the young is the likely explanation. One adult manifested a birth defect that would have afflicted him throughout life, notably impeding his ability to walk. Evidence of bony changes possibly associated with the excessive genuflexion seen in the adult remains were only barely visible on two older teenage bones (patella, femur), which may represent the same person.

Placement of the children's bones in the crypt with the monks, may indicate their vaunted status in the monastery or Byzantine society in general. Finally, the children are quite homogeneous based on a suite of discrete genetic traits, show no significant difference with the adults analyzed, and represent a Near Eastern gene pool. In essence, they appear to be children from the area, buried for some reason in the tomb with the monks of St Stephen's. I will now explore several proposals about who these children may have been, based on the above biology synthesized with written records for the period and region.

Written and archeological analyses of the St Stephen's children

The Byzantine St Stephen's project has shown repeatedly how the synthesis of biological information from the people themselves can enhance what is known from the written and archeological records. With the children, were it not for their actual remains, we would not have known to explore this avenue of inquiry. Their inclusion in the mortuary assemblage has provided an aspect of life in this large urban monastery that would otherwise have gone unnoticed given the dearth of written or material evidence for their presence.

Written accounts from the Byzantine period tell us that terms used for children varied widely. Günter Prinzing¹³⁷ determined nine life stages from Byzantine records, four of which applied to youth depending on physical development and intellect. Age categories used in our demographic reconstruction were modified from Jane Buikstra and Douglas Ubelaker:¹³⁸ fetal (before birth), infant (zero-to-three years), child (four-to-twelve years), adolescent (thirteen-to-fifteen years), teen (sixteen and older). These categories rather nicely correspond to those provided by Byzantine texts.¹³⁹ Childhood legally ended at the age of twenty-five years, but the age of majority varied in reality, based on sex and social status.¹⁴⁰ In general, 'nurslings' defined from birth to ages one-to-three years, during which time they were fed on mother or wet nurse's milk. 'Infant' extended to ages four-to-seven years, seven being the age when one could legally receive the death penalty for murder.¹⁴¹ The teenage years differed by sex based on the start of puberty. For girls this was generally around age twelve years, fourteen years for boys. This also corresponded with legal age of marriage. According to Béatrice Caseau,¹⁴² fifteen years of age was a threshold for being able to make life-altering decisions and the start of

movement towards adulthood. Education, career development, marriage, and monastic vocations were routes commonly taken by the young. I will focus on connections to monastic life, exploring the ages represented by the bones of children in the tombs at St Stephen's.

Writings of the period¹⁴³ claim children were held in high regard, while others discuss how families were 'pushed into economic exigencies we can barely endure to glimpse.'¹⁴⁴ Five possibilities appear in these texts as potential explanations for the presence of the many children buried with the monks—oblates, students, patients, orphans, or neighbors. A fuller understanding of their presence in a monastic tomb may provide a glimpse of adaptive mechanisms for child-rearing in Byzantine society, and the role the early Church played in their growth and development.

Oblates

The monks of St Stephen's were of the Basilian tradition, a cenobitic convention that featured oblation as an aspect of monastic life. This involved a training period for those who hoped to take up the monastic profession, during which time they lived in the community, adopted the dress, activities, diet, and piety of the monks.¹⁴⁵ Accounts from saint's lives often portrayed their subjects as beginning religious life while very young, such as Cyril of Scythopolis's portrayal of Euthemius hearing his call at three years of age, or Symeon Stylites at five, or Peter the Galatian at age seven years.¹⁴⁶ The young were seen as innocents, which may have played a role in their endowment by early authors with spiritual clout.¹⁴⁷ Given a tendency for exaggeration in hagiography however, this was likely a tool to convey precocious piety rather than accurate biography.

The earliest typikon available for the region is from Mar Saba (St Sabas), with prescriptions against 'beardless youths.' One expectation was that children could behave themselves, as well as have enough self-awareness to understand the vows they would be taking on. Children were to be silent, serious, studious, modest, play with moderation—essentially, be adults.¹⁴⁸ Canon law established adolescence (fifteen-to-sixteen years old) as a general age for oblation, though there was enough ambiguity in early monastic rules that a universal dictate regarding age of admission was not established until the late seventh century CE.¹⁴⁹

The temptation of young boys for adult monks was of enough concern that 'a suitable level of maturity (or unattractiveness)¹⁵⁰ was considered a prerequisite for admission. For some, this was indicated by growth of a beard, which not only (supposedly) defrayed any homoerotic compulsions, but also ensured women and eunuchs did not 'sneak in.' Nicholas Kalogeras's (2000) thesis¹⁵¹ on Byzantine education stated that oblates were expected to have a basic understanding of religious teachings, and some ability to read and write before they were allowed into monastic service. Such education did not begin until age six or seven years, and often took approximately seven years to move

to the next phase of learning.¹⁵² Basil recognized the importance of the child's ability to accept the responsibilities he or she was taking on with a monastic vocation, which he felt was a more difficult lifestyle than marriage and therefore extended later than twelve-to-fourteen years.

There seems to have been considerable consternation about the issue given the number of writings on the matter. As Greenfield stated, 'There is clear evidence that children were present in Byzantine monasteries, not only as occasional visitors, like sick children seeking cures, but also on a fairly regularly, indeed permanent basis.'¹⁵³

Of particular significance to the question of whether the children buried in the crypt at St Stephen's were young oblates is the demographic composition of the group, the first of the six Ds of bioarcheology. Our research showed that most of them were ten years old or younger, thus calling into question their role as oblates. The majority died during what was likely a period of weaning, as gleaned directly from the young, as well as from the adults that lived through that stage but demonstrate evidence of the considerable physiological stress that a transition to adult foods often brings. Furthermore, we found evidence for young girls in the group, who by the writings of the period would have undergone their religious formation in convents, not a monastery.

It is worth noting that we did have a few examples of possible pathological evidence that at least one individual in his late teens may have been involved in the rigorous genuflection practiced by adult members of the community. His age was well above the ten-year-old restriction for oblates, and it is likely that he was considered an adult or near-adult member of the group. Given the demographic evidence from the majority of children's remains, however, the postulate that they were oblates does not appear supported by the biological record.

School

Education was an important component of Byzantine life for those that hoped to hold public office, engage in trade, join religious institutions, administer, etc. Many received at least the first phase of education, which included reading stories from the Bible and hagiography. The latter provided a foundation in Church teachings and demonstrated a model for piety. Formal education began at about six-to-seven years of age, with greater emphasis placed on males being tutored or attending school, since education was considered a gateway to gaining status in Byzantine society.¹⁵⁴ Girls were often taught at home by their mothers about how to be good wives and how to raise children. That said, Ann Moffatt observed that 'schooling was considered the proper occupation for children, and basic literacy was probably widespread, both socially and geographically.'¹⁵⁵

As the daughter of a professor and herself a poet, Empress Eudocia supported education and formed schools in Palestine.¹⁵⁶ Chatham Downey (1958: 305) observed that 'the professional men of letters of Eudocia's day

were no doubt grateful for the valuable support given to their studies by the imperial sample.¹⁵⁷

Some religious authors of the period expressed distrust of education, particularly if it involved pagan or Hellenistic influences;¹⁵⁸ however, it is clear that many children received their education from monasteries, living at or near where they learned.¹⁵⁹ Cecily Hennessy (2008: 68) noted that 'perhaps our initial image of monasteries as childless and celibate leads us to overlook the presence of children in many of them, particularly those which ran schools.' Unfortunately, we have no written record of Byzantine St Stephen's serving as a school; however, it was a known function of monasteries of the period. Basil of Caesarea charged monasteries with caring for and educating children.¹⁶⁰ Henri Irénée Marrou claimed that many served as 'technical schools'¹⁶¹ to produce people in service to the Church.

The first stage of education lasted approximately seven years and, for many, this marked the end of formal learning. There was a second tier of education for those who wanted to continue studying, which began in their twelfth to fourteenth year. This age was significant in Byzantine society because it marked the age at which girls (twelve) and boys (fourteen) could marry. A third level of learning could occur at episcopal schools (*domus ecclesiae*) that taught specialized skills, present in many large cities such as Gaza and Caesarea.¹⁶²

For Byzantine St Stephen's, while we do have individuals in this adolescent age group who may have been pursuing their second or third levels of education, most died prior to reaching the appropriate age. Indeed, the majority were dead even before the six-to-seven-year-old start of formal education. According to Kalorgeras, Basil was the first to introduce the idea of educating children in monastic schools, organizing 'a boarding school in which he accepted boys and girls of various ages.'¹⁶³ Thus, while age calls the presence of a school at St Stephen's into question, the possible presence of young girls does not rule out this function.

Hospital

Basil's Cappadocian tradition again provided motivation for care of the sick,¹⁶⁴ a practice that Merideth attributed to the natural extension of Jewish tradition.¹⁶⁵ Many hospitals run by monks were present in Palestine until the mid-fifth century, in connection with Sabas, Theodosius, and others. Authority over the establishment, administration and endowment of hospitals shifted in 451 CE with the Council of Chalcedon, to bishops as a means to consolidate power.¹⁶⁶ Justinian endowed a very large hospital associated with the Nea Church inside the Jerusalem city walls, which the Piacenza pilgrim claimed held 3,000 beds.¹⁶⁷

As mentioned throughout this chapter, infant mortality before age five is high; for the Byzantine period, it has been estimated at nearly fifty percent.¹⁶⁸ We know of two major causes at this time in Palestine—the ever-present dangers associated with weaning, and frequent occurrences of the

Justinianic plague that began in the mid-sixth century CE. The first five years of childhood are generally the most dangerous for infant survival under the best of conditions, added stressors from medical practices and/or disease outbreaks only exacerbated childhood mortality in Byzantium.

Following the earlier recommendations of Galen of Pergamon and Soranus of Ephesus (second century CE), Byzantine doctors like Paul of Aegina (seventh century CE) prescribed the start of weaning at approximately six months old.¹⁶⁹ Galen marked this with the eruption of the front teeth, ending the process of weaning as late as three years of age.¹⁷⁰ Oribasius of Pergamum (fourth century CE) and Aetios of Amida (late fifth to sixth century CE) recommended the complete end to breastfeeding somewhat earlier, by twenty to twenty-four months of age.¹⁷¹ Breastfeeding by the birth mother was preferred by Galen and Soranus, and later by Paul of Aegina because they felt her milk was more healthy for the infant and it promoted bonding between mother and child.¹⁷² Wet nurses were apparently commonplace from the second century CE, but became increasingly rare by the sixth and seventh centuries.¹⁷³

Some of the breastfeeding methods recommended during this period may have increased childhood morbidity and mortality. For example, Oribasius recommended feeding a neonate clear honey for several days after birth; however, honey can contain microbial spores such as *Clostridium botulinum*.¹⁷⁴ Oribasius likewise thought the colostrum produced when a woman began breastfeeding was too thick and yellow for infant health; today it is considered a 'superfood' due to its abundance of antibodies, low fat, high protein content, and its role in establishing proper blood glucose levels.¹⁷⁵ When added to the list of problems associated with weaning, such as the introduction of infectious agents from adult foods to a developing immune system, digestive intolerance of adult foods, choking hazards, weanling diarrhea, endocrine disruption, etc., it is not surprising that this age represents a period of high infant death.¹⁷⁶

Of perhaps greater impact on mid-sixth-century children's survival was a plague that burned through Palestine about every fifteen years, though with decreasing virulence over time.¹⁷⁷ It lasted from 541 to 767 CE, spreading throughout north Africa, the Ancient Near East, and Europe. Destruction of the Temple to Isis in southern Egypt in 540 CE, the goddess who purportedly taught humans how to cure disease, was seen by some as the cause of the outbreak the following year—eventually named for the emperor who ordered the temple's ruin.¹⁷⁸ As with the Black Death 600 years later, the disease caused disruptions in farming and trade that had a substantial impact on the empire.¹⁷⁹ According to Claudine Dauphin, Byzantine Palestine was rife with epidemic potential given the growth of large cities and concomitant presence of poor sanitation, pollution, and crowding. She noted the dearth of bathhouses in the countryside, highlighting the 'uncleanliness of the masses'¹⁸⁰ as a contributor to illness.

Debate has been ongoing about the causative agent of this disease with viral hemorrhagic fever¹⁸¹ and the Spanish flu as possible contenders,¹⁸² although *Yersinia pestis* has now been conclusively shown as the culprit.¹⁸³ It was believed to be a 'young' organism given its initial virulence, that developed

in Africa shortly before the outbreak of the Justinianic plague; however, more detailed genetic analyses have pushed back its evolution at least 10,000 years, originating in Asia.¹⁸⁴

Ann Moffatt observed that it was particularly hard on pregnant and nursing women,¹⁸⁵ with a 555 outbreak that was noted at the time for its impact on children.¹⁸⁶ Accounts from many sources, in multiple languages and from widely differing social settings agreed that the disease 'hit the Mediterranean world like a hammer blow.'¹⁸⁷ As much as 25% of the population at the time may have died from the disease.¹⁸⁸ Some of the reported treatments for the disease included home remedies such as bathing in cold water, magic in the form of amulets and rings, drugs that contained alkaloids, and powders blessed by holy men. People also went to hospitals in large numbers.¹⁸⁹

Empress Eudocia, benefactress of Byzantine St Stephen's, has been credited with many building projects in and around Jerusalem, including hospitals (Miller, 1997; Klein, 2014). Yitzar Hirschfeld (1992) observed that monks were indeed employed not only as physicians, but in a variety of medically related roles, such as orderlies and apothecaries. This led Blake Leyerle to postulate that the children buried at St Stephen's monastery were indeed patients at a hospital run by the monks. She proposed that the large size of the compound as well as its dedication to the Christian protomartyr suggested an association with charitable activity.

Certainly a monastery dedicated to the care of the sick, among whom children were always over-represented, would go a long way towards explaining the presence of a large number of very young children who appear to have died under monastic care.¹⁹⁰

Under Justinian, specialized institutions (brephotrophia) for infant care were present in sixth-century Byzantium.¹⁹¹

While it is possible that St Stephen's ran a children's hospital, it is worth noting that there were several medical facilities just inside the Damascus gate (then known as Stephen's Gate), including a hospital for children.¹⁹² As previously mentioned, the monastery was only a 'bow shot' from that gate, making the nearness of two comparable facilities unusual. From the biological data, we cannot comment on the role the Justinianic plague may have played in the death of these children. It killed those infected too quickly to leave skeletal markers on adults or children, and given our difficulties with fungal intrusions, we have not been able to isolate *Yersinia pestis* DNA from bone, dentin, or calculus (hardened tartar). As to the impact of weaning, we have clearly demonstrated that the majority of children buried at St Stephen's died during the prescribed weaning period, providing a reason they might have needed medical intervention. However, to care for a large number of unweaned infants, the monastery would have had to employ many wet nurses. It is not clear from the literature of the period that this was a common occurrence in monastic hospitals, although Timothy S. Miller does postulate that brephotrophia, specifically established for infants, must have had a system for breastfeeding those in their care.¹⁹³

Orphanage

The Byzantine period saw the rise of a new charitable institution run by monasteries—the orphanage.¹⁹⁴ The concept of caring for orphans by the Church dated to the second century, but increasing population size and new legislation associated with the empire's shift to Christianity forced a more organized, institutionalized approach. Indeed, one of most distinguished philanthropic structures in Constantinople was built in the mid-fourth century to educate and care for orphans, known as an imperial Orphanotropheion.¹⁹⁵

Infanticide became illegal in the late fourth century CE, so abandonment or exposure of infants became an alternative. John Boswell defined abandonment as the 'voluntary and permanent relinquishing of control over children by natal parents or guardians, whether by leaving them somewhere, selling them, or legally consigning care and control to some other person.'¹⁹⁶ He argued that parents understood the dangers of abandonment but many viewed it as a means to improve a child's lot in life through the intervention of strangers, the will of the gods, or simply fate, with the understanding that if not taken in, the child might die 'but the family did not kill him.'¹⁹⁷ Not surprisingly, most abandoned children were female

In 541 CE, Justinian named child abandonment a form of murder.¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the plethora of laws on this issue as well as texts describing monastic policies about the care of orphans, indicate that abandonment was still relatively commonplace. In fact, an interesting shift occurred in the sixth century, where people left unwanted children near churches and monasteries, or along paths that monks were known to traverse with regularity.¹⁹⁹

No aspect of our biological analyses precludes the possibility of an orphanage at Byzantine St Stephen's, beyond the lack of reference to such in any writings of the period found to date. However, unlike the case for oblates or a school, the demographic data do not preclude this possibility. And unlike the hypothesis that this was a hospital, there are no records of corresponding facilities nearby. Biodistance analyses indicated a homogeneous group of children genetically, who did not differ from people in the surrounding region, giving credence to this possibility. Indeed, when considering the toll the plague may have taken on pregnant and lactating mothers, the need for orphanages in Palestine was likely quite high.

Neighborhood children

A final possibility for the presence of children in the St Stephen's repository is the possibility that children were ascribed a specialized status worthy of burial with the remains of venerated individuals. Burial near holy figures, or *depositio ad sanctos*, grew in popularity during the Byzantine period.²⁰⁰ Children held a unique status as innocents and were regarded as innately holy, permitting their interment in a monastery.²⁰¹ This becomes even more significant if Cave Complex 1 indeed represents the elites of this Byzantine community.

In the absence of comparative collections of children's remains from the surrounding region, we cannot know whether morbidity and mortality patterns among the young of Byzantine Jerusalem are similar to those buried in the monastery. Unfortunately, working with human remains in present-day Israel/Palestine is complicated and the Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) must adhere to rules established by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.²⁰² This precludes detailed study of skeletal assemblages, as the bones have to be reburied in a limited time frame, and destructive analyses are often not permitted. Thus, analysis of comparative collections from the region are not available. The Byzantine St Stephen's project was not held to those standards since permission for excavation of the site dated to a time prior to the above rules, and because the site is located on property under the purview of the French Government. Nevertheless, we did get the permission of the IAA to study the remains when our analyses began.

As with the orphanage possibility, nothing precludes this as an explanation for the children at Byzantine St Stephen's. The biodistance data support this supposition, as do the demographic profile and burial context.

Conclusion

Lawrence Hirschfeld once asked, 'Why don't anthropologists like children?'²⁰³ pointing out that because they learn culture faster and more creatively than adults, they should be of major interest to the discipline. He was referring to cultural anthropology's apparent aversion to studying children; however, the same has been true when dealing with ancient remains. The rather late enthusiasm for childhood bioarchaeology is indeed curious, given the wealth of information stored in their skeletons about individual lives, as well as their role and status in communities. We are at a fortunate convergence of methods and materials, permitting a meaningful exploration of topics avoided in the past. For the St Stephen's project, this is further aided by the copious textual information about life in Byzantine Palestine, with new information appearing regularly.²⁰⁴

Our analyses of these children have been possible because the collection has been available for twenty+ years. It thus stands as an example of the utility of long-term analysis of human remains to fully understand ancient lifeways. Excellent curation of the bones, a willingness to try new methodologies when they become available, and a highly integrated, interdisciplinary research design have been key to success. Future analyses will build on these data, asking new questions and retesting previous suppositions.

We begin with an inescapable fact: we have the bone of nearly sixty children in the Byzantine St Stephen's assemblage. They were buried there over the ~180 years the tombs were used by the monastery. The majority of children died before reaching their third birthday, an age that corresponds to what the biological and textual records tell us was a dietary transition from mother's milk to adult foods—a period of physiological stress evidence even in the adult segment of the assemblage. We found evidence of some girls amongst those in the

assemblage, although we cannot quantify their number. Very few examples of disease were seen on the children's bones or teeth, a likely consequence of rapid growth and development during childhood. One late teen showed possible evidence of adult liturgical practice (excessive genuflection); however, he was likely not considered a child by the community. Also, one adult demonstrated a birth defect that markedly impeded his ability to walk throughout life. The location of the children's bones, mixed with the remains of the monks, provides evidence for their special status. If oral tradition led the Byzantine inhabitants to recognize the antiquity of the tombs, and/or a possible connection to the last Davidic kings of Israel, then the location may have been considered quite vaunted at the time. The homogeneity of genetic indicators of the teeth indicate that the children came from the region, and stable isotope levels further specify that they were from the area around Jerusalem.

In assessing theories for the presence of these children buried at St Stephen's, we are able to exclude them as young oblates based on the demographic information. The presence of a school is likewise questionable given their very young age at death. We cannot dismiss the idea that a hospital may have been associated with St Stephen's, although the nearness of several medical institutions, including a nearby children's hospital does introduce doubt. Given the high infant mortality of the period due to weaning, the regular reappearance of the Justinianic plague during the sixth and seventh centuries CE, and the usual suite of factors that affect the morbidity and mortality of young children, we cannot rule out either a role of the monastery as an orphanage and/or a venerated site used by the surrounding community for child burials. In conjunction with the biodistance data indicating they were from the area, these possibilities become even more plausible.

Studies currently planned or underway will continue to address these and other issues. They include application of a new method for sex determination using peptides in tooth enamel,²⁰⁵ sectioning of teeth to look at the neonatal line (birth stress) and serial sampling of dentin for life course aspects of childhood and maternal health,²⁰⁶ and targeted screening of aDNA samples using 'next-gen' sequencing methods to assess population affinity.²⁰⁷ And we continue to slowly collect more radiocarbon dates for the children as funds become available, to refine the temporal span for this segment of the burial assemblage. In summary, application of an integrative, bioarcheological approach to the burial assemblage at Byzantine St Stephen's has allowed us to explore aspects of childhood health and adaptability as well as the possible role of the monastery vis-à-vis the children.

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... the archbishop summoned all the monks to the holy city overnight, gather them from all sides; those who counted the multitude announced that the total came to ten thousand monks. Since no church could hold so great a congregation, it was decided that all should assemble at the church of holy protomartyr Stephen, which was capacious enough to receive the multitude ...

(Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, 160–161)
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Afterword



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10 *Protoevangelium of James*, menstruating Mary, and twenty-first-century adolescence

Purity, liminality, and the
sexual female¹

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One might wonder what a menstruating Mary could have to do with adolescent females in the twenty-first century. Teen girls in the current Western world (certainly) and the rest of the world (likely) face the daunting task of navigating conflicting social expectations regarding their maturing sexual bodies. They are socially monitored both for meeting standards of purity and standards of beauty and sexiness. In this paper, I explore the ways in which an ancient apocryphal text, the *Protoevangelium of James* (*Prot Jas*), has informed perceptions of Mary, the Mother of God, as ritually, sexually, and, more tangentially, genealogically pure, and how those perceptions have made their way into contemporary constructions of adolescent females' sexuality. Ultimately, I suggest that the parallel liminality of Mary in *Prot Jas* and of adolescent girls today serves to trace elements of Mary's story into the stories of current young females.

In the *Protoevangelium of James*, an apocryphal Christian text likely dating to the second century, we find a probing interest in the life of Mary, the Mother of God.² Indeed, she is the protagonist of the narrative. Rather unlike most early Christian texts, this one aims to expand upon *Mary's* story from her own conception until the birth of her son, Jesus. Widely understood as an apologetic account of Mary's purity, that which qualifies her to bear the Son of God, *Prot Jas* provides details that attest to her purity in keeping with both the Jewish and Christian traditions.³ What interests me about the text is precisely the intersection of purity, menstruation/parturition,⁴ and liminality that characterize Mary's embodied self. Further, the parallels with contemporary pubescent adolescent females as liminal bodies in sexual development invite questions as to our postmodern understanding of menstruation and purity among adolescent girls.

By liminality, I here refer to the thresholds of human experience: those transitional moments, states, and psychic landing points of crossing from one place to another, which reference our development and movement through the world.⁵ Our histories of life are frequently scattered with already-now/not yet occasions of ambivalence regarding our own persons. Adolescence is such

a moment in twenty-first-century living: liminal insofar as one is already now not a child, but neither is one yet an adult. Historically, this liminal pause was far shorter than it is today. Mary clearly did not have an eight-to-ten-year adolescence during which to decide about her adult life. According to *Prot Jas*, at twelve years old she entered her maiden adulthood (8:2–3).⁶ Teen girls today walk precariously along the limen of childhood and adulthood, with puberty initiating as early as eight years old. With no commonly understood end point of adolescence, ambivalence cuts a wide chronological swath in the life of a postmodern teen.

In this paper, I explore the *Protoevangelium of James* in its historical context as a consideration of Mary, the Mother of God. I also explore the enduring presence of the person and spirit of Mary in global human consciousness. Mary's depiction in this proto-gospel, the 'gospel *before* the gospels,'⁷ is unique in its frank scrutiny of her multi-faceted purity. Following an exploration of Mary and *Prot Jas*, I investigate contemporary perceptions of adolescence, purity, menstruation, sexuality, and the liminality of adolescent females. Ultimately, I scrutinize the scrutiny of female, sexual bodies on the threshold of adulthood, in relation to historical and traditional perceptions of purity and womanhood, through the lens of Marian purity.

The *Protoevangelium of James*

This apocryphal text, also known as the *Infancy Gospel of James*, appears to be a second-century text accounting for the early life of Mary.⁸ Its unique interlacing of Jewish and Christian purity concerns points to an author keen to prop up the Christian claims of Mary's *virginitas in partu*, who is nonetheless sympathetic to Jewish social and religious customs regarding purity. Bockmuehl points out that most scholars understand the text to be 'historically worthless,' except insofar as it attests to the piety concerns of second-century Christians.⁹ Although purportedly written by James, the brother of Jesus, its likely reliance on the canonical Gospels of Matthew and Luke preclude that possibility.¹⁰ While on the surface the text seems unfamiliar with contemporary geography and Jewish custom, Nutzman points out that the author was familiar enough with Jewish ritual and practice to include Mary in three of the only groups of women with full access to the Temple (sparing the Holy of Holies).¹¹ By so doing, the author was drawing on both Jewish customs (perhaps responding to Jewish skeptics of the virgin birth) and the exigencies of Christology (Jesus as both human and divine) to insert Mary's purity and holiness definitively into the Christian story.¹²

Another interesting concern articulated in *Prot Jas* is its direct connection of Mary to the House of David (10:1–2), rather than tracing the lineage of Joseph to the House of David, as done in the canonical gospels (Matt 1:20; Luke 2:4).¹³ Establishing Jesus as having biologically descended from David requires him to be related to Mary rather than Joseph, since Joseph is decidedly not the biological father of her child. This narrative feature

attempts to establish Mary's, and therefore Jesus's, royal lineage and Mary's genealogical purity and worthiness as the mother of God.¹⁴ Although Mary's genealogical purity is tangential to my discussion, still it demonstrates the Jewish concern for her family purity within the Jewish community.

The story itself digresses somewhat from the gospel accounts of the nativity in Matthew and Luke. It begins with the childless Joachim and Anna, wealthy Israelites who bemoan their lack of children (1–2:4). Anna prays that she and Joachim will be blessed with a child (2:4–3) and is presently visited by an angel of the Lord, who announces to each of them separately that Anna is with child (4); Anna responds by dedicating her child to lifelong service of the Lord (4:1). Anna has the girl-child, Mary, completes her days of ritual post-partum impurity, and then begins to breastfeed (5:2).¹⁵ Mary proves a remarkable child who walks at six months and, at Anna's doing, lives in a sanctuary of purity within the home, tended by the 'undefiled daughters of the Hebrews' (6:1). When Mary is three, Joachim and Anna bring her to the Temple to live, to fulfill their promise to the Lord. She is graciously received, praised and loved by the 'entire house of Israel' (7:1–3), and subsequently fed from the 'hand of an angel' (8:1).

When she reaches the age of twelve,¹⁶ the Temple priests decide Mary can no longer reside there, presumably recognizing that her imminent menarche would defile the Temple.¹⁷ Upon prayer, the priests gather the widowers from among the Israelites to discern which among them will be chosen by the Lord God to be Mary's guardian. This man is Joseph (9:1–3). Upon bringing Mary to his home, he immediately abandons her for his work as a builder and leaves her under the watch of the Lord (8–9); they are not yet married. While Joseph is away, Mary is recruited as an 'undefiled virgin from the tribe of David' to spin curtains for the Temple (10). At some point thereafter, Mary experiences an angel of the Lord, an annunciation of her conception of the 'Son of the Highest' from the Word of the Lord (11:3). She questions whether this conception and birth will be like every other woman's (it will not) and ultimately accepts the Lord's choice for her (11). Like the Lukan account, Mary sets off to visit her cousin Elizabeth (mother of John the Baptist), stays for three months, and returns home obviously pregnant (12). The *Prot Jas* here states that Mary is sixteen years old (12:3).

When Joseph returns he discovers Mary six months along in her pregnancy; brouhaha ensues in the household and among the Jewish Temple authorities (13–16). Mary's sexual purity has been disrupted and Joseph is assumed to have defiled her. They are both made by the high priest to take the bitter water test (normally reserved to discern the guilt of accused adulteresses) and they are both exonerated of having committed any sexual violation (16).¹⁸ When they are notified of the king's census and the necessity of travelling to Bethlehem, Joseph dithers about how to register Mary: as his daughter or as his wife? She is neither, yet. Nonetheless, he seats her on the donkey and they depart on their journey. Halfway to Bethlehem, Mary goes into labor;¹⁹ Joseph finds a cave in which she can give birth, a place to hide her shame (17:3–18:1).

Off looking for a Hebrew midwife, Joseph is absent when Mary actually gives birth in the cave; Joseph experiences a momentary break in continuous time (18:1–2), apparently simultaneously to Jesus's birth, which is a portentous sign of the significance of Jesus's birth. While away, Joseph happens upon *two* midwives. The first midwife sees the great light around the child, recognizes his salvific power, and believes in Mary's virginal status (19:1–2). The second midwife, Salome, is somewhat more skeptical and insists on inserting her finger to examine Mary's sexual status; her hand catches fire, Jesus puts the fire out and heals her hand. Salome is convinced (19:3–20:3).

The remainder of *Prot Jas* (21–25) is more concerned with the events surrounding Jesus's birth than Jesus or Mary themselves. The magi appear (21), Herod issues his decree to kill every infant under the age of two (22), both Mary and Elizabeth take pains to hide their sons (22:2–3), and Zacharias (the 'chief priest' of the Temple and Elizabeth's husband) is murdered in the Temple (23–24). Although not a canonical gospel, this text is the source of a number of facets of the Christian nativity story not mentioned in the Bible that remain in the collective consciousness of the Christian community. In relation to Mary, for example, are the names of Mary's parents, Anna and Joachim, and their story of infertility; Mary's genealogical descent from the House of David; the vast age difference between Mary and Joseph; Mary's donkey ride to Bethlehem; and Mary's perpetual virginity.²⁰ None of these elements of Mary's story appear in the canonical gospels, which seems to demonstrate the author's keen interest in fleshing her out more robustly for the evolving second-century Christian community.

As an apocryphal text, a proto-gospel, some conspicuous singularities within the text and in relation to Jewish custom affect our concerns. These textual idiosyncrasies have long led scholars to assert that the author of *Prot Jas* was a Christian wildly unfamiliar with Jewish custom and even Palestinian geography.²¹ However, upon closer examination, there are indications that perhaps the author was more familiar with Jewish faith and practice than earlier believed, and that their familiarities directly affect our perceptions of Mary.²² A first unique feature is Mary's relationship to and residence within the Temple. Although females did have a space reserved for them in the women's court of the Temple, including an assigned chamber within for avowed Nazirites, it would be unthinkable for any of them to take up residence in the Holy of Holies, as the text retrospectively suggests Mary had (15:3).²³ Nutzman undertakes a close assessment of this portrayal, including the single problematic assertion that Mary would have resided in the Holy of Holies,²⁴ and concludes that her residence in the Temple is closely associated with the residence of Nazirite women. In parallel to the story of Hannah and Samuel (1 Sam 1–2), wherein the barren Hannah conceives Samuel following prayers to God, subsequently promises to return her child to God, and leaves him in the Temple at the age of three, Anna conceives Mary under circumstances similar to Hannah (*Prot Jas* 4–7), promises her to God, and subsequently leaves her at the Temple at the age of three. Samuel became popularly understood as a

Nazirite in the second Temple period,²⁵ which corresponds with the parallels of the second-century *Prot Jas* text. If indeed Mary was portrayed as being dedicated as a Nazirite by her mother, Anna, to the Temple, it would credibly protect her purity from ages three to twelve, establish her standing in a community reflecting actual Jewish practice, give her unique access to the Temple, and place her squarely in a position of worthiness to bear the Son of God.²⁶ Nutzman thus posits that this seeming lack of awareness of Jewish custom in *Prot Jas* actually demonstrates more than a passing familiarity with purity concerns of the time.

A second unique feature of the text relates to Mary's age at the time of Jesus' birth; there is some confusion about her age within the text itself. If she is sixteen, as the text at one point suggests (12:3), we are faced with the unlikely scenario that Joseph left her alone in his home for four years while away working, knowing that Mary left the Temple to live with Joseph when she was twelve. Given that her entire existence until that time was meticulously concerned with the preservation of her purity, a four-year absence of her guardian would leave Mary quite vulnerable to defilement. There are varying interpretations of this inconsistency;²⁷ however, most scholars believe Mary was more likely around the age of twelve than sixteen in *Prot Jas* when Jesus was conceived and born.

An interesting third feature of *Prot Jas* is that its concern for Mary's purity once leaving the Temple shifts from a focus on menstrual purity (i.e., ritual purity in relation to the Temple) to sexual purity (i.e., her virginity), which possibly reflects the author's shift from a Jewish focus to a Christian focus. She is obviously regarded as a virgin by the Temple authorities who engage her to spin the Temple curtains, along with other virginal daughters of Israel. Nutzman proposes that this scenario suggests that the text displays another connection to contemporary Jewish custom: that virgin daughters of Israel were typically responsible for weaving the Temple curtains. Mary's commission to weave the Temple curtains further supports her relationship to the Temple as a virgin, as sexually pure.²⁸ The connection to Judaic custom here serves both to establish Mary's unique place in the Jewish community and to identify her standing as a woman of purity for the Christian community; she remained a virgin even after moving into Joseph's home.

A fourth exceptional feature of the text is an apparent discrepancy between its depiction of, and Jewish custom related to, the bitter water ordeal, or water of conviction test (*Prot Jas* 16). The history around the test was its proposed use in Numbers (5:11–31) in determining if a wife accused of adultery was in fact guilty.²⁹ It is unusual that a male would also be partaking of the test. However, as Horner points out,³⁰ both Joseph and Mary are considered to have acted inappropriately here; Mary became pregnant while Joseph was away, he clearly was not the father, and someone else must be. Joseph was charged with Mary's guardianship and she became pregnant, he thus broke his trust with both Mary and the Temple authorities to protect her purity. In this peculiar setting, based on Horner's reading of the Mishnaic tradition,

both are considered at fault; both take the bitter water test as a means of getting at the *truth*, rather than punishing a possibly adulterous wife. Because they both seem to pass the test, Mary's purity is considered to have remained intact, while Joseph's guardianship is maintained. Most significant about this passage for our purposes here is that Mary's sexual purity is not disrupted; she is shown to have conceived outside of the conventional means, as she was told she would (*Prot Jas* 11:2–3) and her innocence satisfies both Jewish and Christian concerns for purity.

Nutzman argues that 'in addition to affirming Mary's chastity, the bitter water ordeal carried a further implication for those familiar with Jewish tradition: it would have reinforced the special connection that Mary had to the temple,' allowing her 'greater participation in the temple cult than most women of her time' by a special dispensation for accused adulteresses to wave their own offerings in the Temple.³¹ The author's inclusion of the test in *Prot Jas* therefore serves both to confirm Mary's sexual purity and solidify her standing in the Jewish community.

The importance of the *Protoevangelium of James* in a discussion of Mary is multifaceted. First, Mary is the focus of this text, unlike any of the canonical gospels. This focus likely indicates a particular interest among second-century Christians in the person of Mary and her virginal status, and perhaps a response to skeptical Jews and pagans. Second, her purity is front and center in this document and reveals a sort of liminality that, ultimately, comes to flavor the Christian and cultural understanding of women, purity, reproduction, sexuality, and menstruation. Third, *Prot Jas* connects Jewish notions of purity with Christian interpretations and developments of those notions, some of which continue to inform our perceptions of female sexuality today, not least of all adolescent female sexuality. In this light, I now turn to Mary herself, as she is depicted in *Prot Jas*, to unveil the sometimes tacit, sometimes explicit liminal connections between her and her modern counterparts.

Mary and her depiction in the *Protoevangelium of James*

Mary, the Mother of God, serves as the lone female figure of prominence in the spiritual domain of the Christian tradition. Although she herself is not divine, her birthing of the divine savior roots her deeply in the Christian story; she literally bears redemption in her womb.³² Mary receives scant mention in the canonical Christian scriptures but her place as a source of succor to Christians throughout history is well referenced.³³ She has variously contrasted the predominantly male Trinity and bolstered the dignity of females in their traditionally interpreted inheritance: service, reproduction, and childrearing. As the most prominent female in the Christian tradition, she has borne the brunt of shifting perceptions of her as a historically factual woman,³⁴ as a model of female sexuality and purity,³⁵ and as a model of womanhood.³⁶ When presented as a model in these ways, however, some depictions of Mary's purity present other women with an existential and ontological conundrum.³⁷

The purity of the Mother of God, the immaculately conceived *virgin* Mother of God, seems out of reach for females the world over. We can be virgins or we can be birthers, but we cannot be both in an embodied way. Clearly, Mary occupies a liminal space of ambiguous sexual standing: already now a mother but not yet sexually active.

Given the historical focus on Mary's sexual standing, it seems odd that in the plethora of accounts of her life and meaning,³⁸ we encounter very few that deal with the embodied phenomenon of Mary's menstruation. In fact, *Prot Jas* is remarkable in its attention to her imminent menstruation and its relation to purity in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. The common omission of Mary's menstrual realities is important to contemporary perceptions of females, purity, sexuality, and menstruation. If Mary does not menstruate, or at least is not depicted as menstruating, and is the model of purity, and if purity is the female model projected onto all menstruants, then our perceptions of ourselves as females cannot be in concert with Marian ideals, unless we are similarly constructed as non-menstruating. A non-menstruating virgin Mother of God effectually creates a perception of purity that is unattainable for actual females and distances Mary from the embodied sexualities of their lives. Furthermore, this perception of sexual purity has traditionally served females poorly; it has circumscribed female sexuality within a male construction that is unfamiliar with, disparaging of, and harmful to women's sexual experiences. In this light, *Prot Jas*'s recognition of Mary's burgeoning menstrual body and, thereby, the liminal nature of adolescent female sexuality, might offer a deeper reflection on our own cultural perceptions of menstruating bodies.

In Western history, Mary's prominence in the Christian tradition has migrated into the consciousness of females beyond merely her religious associations. Even today, with the declining influence of Christianity in the Western world, she continues to feature in contemporary literature, art, and popular culture,³⁹ in ways that only a well-lit, 2,000-year-old figure might. This is to say that popular modern perceptions of females as menstrual, pure, or sexual take cues from Christian history and tradition with regard to Mary and purity. In *Prot Jas*, Mary is far more developed and complex than in the canonical gospels. In trying to establish Mary's genealogical, ritual, and sexual purity for both the Jewish and Christian communities of the time, the author situates Mary as a multifaceted and perpetually liminal female. She is pure beyond other women but still subject to the ritual impurities that might affect her relationship to the Temple: she menstruates (*Prot Jas* 8:2). She is a virgin but still bears God in her womb: she reproduces (*Prot Jas* 11:1–3). She is a Jewish girl whose ritual and sexual purity also places her at the center of the Christian tradition: she is complex. In each of these aspects, Mary's liminality is highlighted by the ambiguity of her status. In relating her bleeding body to the Temple, in depicting her birthing of a child while remaining virginally intact, and in mediating the Jewish and Christian relationships with blood and sexuality (particularly females' blood

and sexuality),⁴⁰ Mary is in a perpetually liminal state—on the threshold of purity and impurity, virginity, and sexual experience, found in the imminent shedding of her menstrual blood.

That the *Protoevangelium of James* depicts Mary as three when dedicated to the Lord for life in the Temple, as twelve when leaving the Temple and given over for safekeeping to the much older Joseph, and as somewhere between twelve and sixteen when she births Jesus and encounters Salome's skeptical hand, lends to her relevance in current dialogues about adolescent females and sexuality, purity and virginity, menstruation, and parturition. I turn to contemporary perceptions and realities of adolescent females as pubertal, menarcheal, and sexual. Like Mary, contemporary teen girls are heavily constructed and constricted within social norms and patriarchal controls by which females are monitored; I presently explore some of the persisting barriers and boons to teen girls' menstrual and sexual flourishing. First, however, I digress for a brief interlude of current import regarding adolescent female bodies as sexual and, interestingly, the *Protoevangelium of James*.

An interlude: twenty-first-century realities

As a means of connecting the second-century *Protoevangelium of James* text and contemporary adolescent female realities, I detour briefly here to recount a recent occurrence very much in the North American public eye. Should anyone doubt the enduring influence of ancient texts in the twenty-first century, the following account brings home how misplaced those doubts might be.

In September 2017, Roy Moore won a run-off election to represent the Republican party of the United States of America in a special election to replace the recently appointed Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, as a Senator from Alabama. The election was scheduled for December 12, 2017. On November 9, 2017, *The Washington Post* broke the story that Moore had allegedly initiated a sexual encounter with a fourteen-year-old girl in 1979, while he was the thirty-two-year-old Assistant District Attorney of Alabama.⁴¹ The story further alleged that Moore had approached or dated three other adolescent females (ages sixteen to eighteen) while in his thirties, prior to his marriage. Moore flatly denied having had inappropriate or illegal sexual contact with the fourteen-year-old girl but did not deny having dated teen girls while in his thirties.⁴² The age of consent for sexual activity in Alabama was in 1979, and is currently, sixteen years.

While the allegations against Moore are troubling enough in their own right, Alabama State Auditor Jim Ziegler subsequently (and rather notoriously) justified Moore's behavior by referencing the biblical relationship between another purportedly older adult male and teen female: Joseph and Mary, Jesus's parents.⁴³ I cite this case while addressing Mary, menstruation, and *Prot Jas* to highlight its enduring but perhaps tacit influence on

contemporary Christian consciousness. None of the canonical biblical texts mention the ages of Mary or Joseph.⁴⁴ However, in *Prot Jas*, Mary is depicted as being twelve years old when handed over to the older widower Joseph for safekeeping by the Temple priests, and somewhere between twelve and sixteen when giving birth to Jesus.⁴⁵ Thus Ziegler is, at best, mistakenly referencing an apocryphal gospel in his biblical defense of Moore or, at worst, woefully unfamiliar with the actual biblical texts referencing Mary and Joseph's relationship. Either way, his reference is not strictly biblical. This story also demonstrates how, still today, the ancient story of Mary and its reflection of its time (in this case, the second century) are invoked to justify behaviors that are otherwise unacceptable by modern relational standards and to diminish the negative consequences of those behaviors for others. To defend with an ancient text an action (alleged or otherwise) that was at the time and is currently understood in its own jurisdiction as sexual assault of a minor, in which cultural and social realities are worlds removed from the circumstances in which the action took place, is both ludicrous and dangerous.⁴⁶ That the person undertaking said defense is an agent of a public office is disturbing. Ziegler's implication that Mary's betrothal to Joseph and her ensuing pregnancy is the ancient equivalent of an adult male sexually assaulting a minor in the twentieth century, is a reading of Christian scripture and its contemporary texts that belies the gendered and sexed ideologies spun from millennia of patriarchal perceptions of females and female bodies.

Worth noting here is that the accuser, Leigh Corfman, who was fourteen years old at the time of the incident, was the subject of much scrutiny and derision following her disclosure. The veracity of her account of the 1979 incident was questioned; the relevance of its impact upon her some forty years later was dismissed; her motives in addressing the incident publicly at the time she did were scrutinized as politically driven; and in response to the attentions Moore paid to the girl, some suggested that she was fortunate to have had an older gentleman interested in her.⁴⁷ Perhaps as an expression of Christianity rooted in a fundamentalist, literal reading of ancient scriptural text, the marrying of an older man to a much younger woman seems appropriate to ensure the purity of the female upon marriage. However, given what we know today about age, gender, and power differentials, the sexual purity of a teen female seems more likely to ensure the power of the male over the female in important aspects of their relationship, like sexual expression, agency, and gender roles, than it does to nurture a mutual relationship. In that light, I turn to consider adolescence in the twenty-first century and the factors that might contribute to a situation such as this one.

Adolescence and maturing

Adolescence is a relatively recent social construct, generally understood as a 'prolonged transition period between childhood and adulthood that prepares the young person for occupation, marriage, and mature social roles.'⁴⁸ This

construct delineates a period of time between childhood and adulthood during which a young person experiences multi-faceted development: physical, cognitive, affective, relational, spiritual, and social. Persons typically follow a similar developmental trajectory toward adulthood, although the timing and individual paths are diverse and unique. Social context (e.g., geographical location or religious tradition), genetic and biological inheritance (e.g., cognitive capacity or physical stature), personal nurturance (e.g., familial environment or diet and hygiene), and particular occurrences (e.g., traumas or triumphs) all interact and contribute to individual development. Development typically includes physical maturation, neural growth and pruning,⁴⁹ affective and social individuation, and cognitive evolution.⁵⁰ Adolescence thus constitutes a threshold state of liminality between the childhood years and adult responsibility.

Puberty, the biological onset of adolescence, depends upon multiple factors: health and diet, overall body fat percentage, hormonal triggers, neurological triggers, and social context.⁵¹ The most visible signs of puberty are secondary sex characteristics such as skeletal growth spurts, the appearance of body hair, the achievement of fertility, and the physical shift to support fertility.⁵² For females specifically, the shift also involves breast budding (beginning as early as age eight) and menarche (typically between ages ten and fourteen).⁵³

Contemporary adolescent females: purity, menstruation, and sexuality

With the onset of physical maturation, adolescent females are ushered into a social world in which their bodies are ubiquitously objectified according to the confounding social qualities of both sexiness and purity. On the sexiness side of body monitoring, pubescent girls are frequently targeted with merchandise, clothing, media, toys, and cosmetics that seem more adult-appropriate than teen, and promote premature sexualization of females.⁵⁴ On the purity side of body-monitoring, pubescent girls are taught that sexual purity is the responsibility of the female, and that female physical appearance, including clothing, is the arbiter of sexual availability.⁵⁵

Sexual objectification involves the separation of sexual facets of a female from her complete person. According to Fredrickson and Roberts, sexually objectified females are 'treated as *bodies*-and in particular, as bodies that exist for the use and pleasure of others.'⁵⁶ Such social objectification often leads to self-objectification, that is, the realization that one's body is continuously monitored for its social acceptability and the resulting acquiescence to social norms that solidify one's place within the social structure.⁵⁷ For females, puberty initiates not only physical, biological change, but also social, psychological, and sexual transition into a quagmire of interests competing for their loyalty.

With regard to menarche and menstruation, pubescent girls receive social messaging indicating that it is unacceptable for others to recognize that any

particular female is menstruating at any given time, regardless of the fact that all females menstruate, repeatedly, at some period in their lives.⁵⁸ Here, sexual objectification, body monitoring, and self-objectification results in the realization that female bodies, at puberty, become 'public domain.'⁵⁹ Menstrual matters thus complicate perceptions and realities of adolescence.

Although menstruation seems to have made minor inroads into contemporary popular cultural visibility,⁶⁰ it has historically been and generally continues to be hidden, despite being a perennial reality for all menstruants.⁶¹ Globally, most females are enculturated to hide, prevent, or disparage menstrual bleeding.⁶² In some societies, menarche also initiates a barrier to formal education or work for females, given the cultural taboos around menstruation itself and limited access to effective, hygienic, and safe menstrual amenities (e.g., clean water, private bathrooms) and products (e.g., menstrual cups, tampons, pads).⁶³ With a general perception of menstruation as a hygienic crisis, an unnecessary (or even 'unnatural') aspect of female sexuality, or a messy inconvenience best kept under wraps, societies around the globe have effectively denounced a key aspect of female sexuality as shameful and unsavory.⁶⁴

From menarche to menopause, females are targeted with advertising of menstrual products meant to control, disguise, and protect others from the reality of menstruation.⁶⁵ One need only turn to the marketing mammoth of products aiming to control menstruation to recognize its potential influence on the female psyche: *feminine-hygiene* products (cf. the more accurate *menstrual-hygiene*), birth control strategies, and ubiquitous body monitoring all aim to hide female bleeding bodies.

The social desire to mask menstruation stems, in part, from complex expectations of purity assigned particularly to females. A long history of perceptions and practices related to purity colors Western history within both Jewish and Christian cultures. Ritual purity in relation to the Jewish Temple and on occasion the Christian Church, and sexual purity in relation to female bodies in both Jewish and Christian practice have wound through social structures over millennia to inform perceptions of female bleeding bodies. First, as ritually impure, females were bound to practices dictated by their menstrual flow when engaging both in their faith practices and with their communities, for instance, Niddah, the ritual impurity of menstruating females in Jewish faith and practice.⁶⁶ Second, menstruating females were under suspicion of pollution and uncleanness (beyond ritual purity in relation to the Jewish Temple) in relation to evolving Church practice and teaching in the Christian realm, most pointedly with regard to reception of the Eucharist.⁶⁷ Third, menstruation itself was reviled as somehow polluting and a result of human sinfulness, rather than a simple sign of fertility among females.⁶⁸ Finally, purity notions in the Christian Church evolved towards sexual purity and the pure female as the virgin Bride of Christ, the pinnacle of female Christian vocation.⁶⁹ Given the early continuity of Jewish and Christian perceptions of ritual purity, and the later

Christian focus on sexual purity as predominant cultural shapers of the Western world, the messages purveyed therein were both personally and socially predominant for females steeped in those cultures. The messaging began early for a maturing girl and was persistent throughout her life. It is not a stretch, therefore, to tag purity notions from Jewish and Christian traditions as means by which contemporary females interpret their own menstrual and sexual bodies.

Mary, menstruation, and adolescent female bodies

The messaging that today's adolescent females receive about menstruation, purity, and sexiness conspire to confine them to perpetual liminality, much like Mary in the *Protoevangelium of James*. They are already now embarked on embodied sexual development but are not yet sexually mature. They reside in the space of so-called purity but are objectified for sexiness. Within *Prot Jas*, Mary too experienced continual surveillance by her community as the pure Daughter of Israel (6:1; 8:1–2; 9:1–10:1; 12:3; 13:1–14:2), while having her fertility scrutinized by the male elders of her community (15:1–16:3). The difficulty for contemporary females is that their liminal status will never be resolved by perpetual or even reproductive virginity. Mary's liminality resides in the construction of her ritual, menstrual, and sexual purity, as the locus of her influence as a female and as a model. Whereas contemporary females, adolescent girls, will not find resolution in the notion of purity as either menstrual or sexual, as they navigate the liminality of post-childhood/pre-adulthood, regardless of the waning influence of religious ritual in the meaning of modern lives.

Contemporary adolescent females are invited to enact menstrual purity as a triumph of invisibility and sexual purity as a sign of personal moral character.⁷⁰ And neither are they the arbiters of the notions of purity to which they are subject. Like Mary's (and Joseph's) subjection to the purity test of the bitter water, adolescent females are subject to the less explicit purity tests of social monitoring (e.g., her skirt is too short) and judgment (e.g., she is a slut). Unlike Mary, whose menarche was expected and addressed in its historical context in relation to ritual Temple purity, contemporary pubescent females are acutely aware that the cultures in which they live and norms by which they are judged are willfully blind to the realities of menarche, menstruation, and female sexualities.⁷¹ Shame and disgust are common responses of females to their own menstruating bodies (i.e., self-objectification and judgment), leading to hiding and secrecy around period blood.

Both general and sexual female development are thus monitored and judged by norms developed within patriarchal and sexist constructs whereby females and female bodies are both objectified and denounced. Over the course of history (in particular, the almost two millennia between the *Protoevangelium of James* and the twenty-first century), those constructs, deeply embedded within Western social perceptions of gender normativity, have migrated from strictly religious perceptions to more broadly cultural

perceptions. Thus the liminality of Mary, so clearly related to her Jewish faith and the community in which she lived, is precariously translated to contemporary adolescent females as both sexual and pure. Mary's purity served the decidedly Christian requirement of Jesus's divinity; that *Prot Jas* elaborated on her purity to address both Jewish and Christian questions about Mary in the second century was clearly to situate her status as a matter of faith. Her liminal purity is perpetual.

The average female of the twenty-first century ought to take issue with the notion of purity itself as a determiner of moral sexual status. Given the highly gendered nature of purity standards across the global board, and the almost universal recognition that females are routinely subject to the gendered power structures that use sexuality as currency, it would be absurd to conclude that purity in this iteration is an appropriate measure of contemporary female sexual status. However, should contemporary females consent to the purity standard (and some do),⁷² they might at least take issue with being held to an anachronistic cultural standard of menstrual and sexual purity, which assumed that females were the property of males, females were adults at the onset of menstruation, menstruation rendered females ritually impure, females were responsible for the maintenance of their various realms of purity (regardless of the power differentials between females and males as to matters sexual),⁷³ and purity was arbitrated by the entire community.⁷⁴

Developmentally, the toll on adolescent females of balancing the social expectations of their liminal status (no longer a child/not yet an adult) for both purity and sexiness is tremendous. On the one hand, girls are recognizing the developmental realities that come with puberty—growing breasts, curvier bodies, monthly bleeding, and shifting attentions of boys and adults—while on the other, girls are managing their behaviors to ensure they are not being labeled as sluts. They are encouraged to remain pure while steeped in a culture that willingly capitalizes on their socially driven desire to be older or sexier.⁷⁵

In like fashion, adolescent menstruants are simultaneously told to take control of their periods,⁷⁶ while encouraged to distance themselves from the very bodies that bleed, and give over control of their periods to menstrual management and suppression.⁷⁷ They face the conundrum of accepting their developing bodies and their naturally occurring phenomena, or masking and/or eliminating those phenomena to accommodate social discomfort with their bodies. While menstruation need not be romanticized as a flowers and fields experience of femininity, one might still wonder if obscuring its reality, while perpetuating a social construction of adolescent females as perpetually liminal sexual creatures, serves them well. That Mary continues to operate, even subliminally, as a symbol of the very purity that the author of the *Protoevangelium of James* took pains to depict, seems somewhat counter to the primal nature of the female capacity for creativity. And that the blood of menstruants is camouflaged by sexiness and purity is, perhaps, evidence of our continued discomfort with the power of periods.

Notes

- 1 For the purposes of this paper, with regard to the phenomenon of menstruation, I use the terms *female(s)* or *menstruant(s)* to refer to persons born into bodies with the hormonal and biological structure necessary for menstruation. I recognize that trans females do not menstruate, while trans males might menstruate. This recognition disrupts the binary construction of sex and gender but, I suspect, inadequately addresses the complexities of human sexed and gendered bodies. Further to that complexity, I acknowledge that the dimorphic sexual structure that has characterized Western thought for millennia does not neatly capture the experiences of intersex persons. Finally, I am cognizant of the diversity of menstrual experiences among menstruants and I do not identify females or female sexuality solely with the capacity for menstruation and reproduction. I thank Anthony Easton for his helpful guidance regarding terminology.
- 2 Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše, *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 31–35; Markus Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 61.
- 3 Bockmuehl, *Ancient*, 61–67; Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 34.
- 4 Joan R. Branham provides a thought-provoking reflection on the multivalent nature of blood as it pertains to Jewish concerns for purity in relation to the Temple: menstrual blood in relation to sacrificial and other sorts of blood. Her primary question is:

Could it be that female reproductive blood—almost universally excluded from sacred spaces—is forbidden not because it is considered an “inferior blood,” in some way, to sacrificial blood? Rather, might menses represent a forceful agent, *competitive and threatening* to the powers of sacrificial blood?
 (Branham, ‘Blood in Flux, Sanctity at Issue,’ *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 31, ‘The Object’ (Spring, 1997): 53–70, 53)
- 5 The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘liminal’ as ‘a transitional or indeterminate state between culturally defined stages of a persons’ life’ or ‘such a state occupied during a ritual or rite of passage, characterized by a sense of solidarity between participants.’ I use it here in its first sense. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. ‘liminal,’ accessed February 1, 2018. www.oed.com/view/Entry/248158#eid12021049.
- 6 All references to the text of the *Protoevangelium of James* (*Prot Jas*) are from the translation within Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 40–71.
- 7 Bockmuehl, *Ancient*, 65.
- 8 Bockmuehl, *Ancient*, 55–86.
- 9 Bockmuehl, *Ancient*, 63.
- 10 Bockmuehl, *Ancient*, 61–62.
- 11 Megan Nutzman, ‘Mary in the *Protoevangelium of James*: A Jewish Woman in the Temple?’ *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 53 (2013): 551–578. I discuss this point in more depth below.
- 12 Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 34–35.
- 13 Bockmuehl, *Ancient*, 66–67; Lily C. Vuong, *Gender and Purity in the Protoevangelium of James* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 141–142. All biblical references are from the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV).
- 14 Vuong, *Gender and Purity*, 222–223, 243–244.
- 15 That is, the author is careful to ensure that Anna’s post-partum ritual impurity is resolved before she feeds Mary, thereby initiating the unsullied purity of Mary’s early life.

- 16 Horner discusses the relevance of Mary's age (three and twelve) regarding Judaism as reflected in the Mishnah: Timothy J. Horner, 'Jewish Aspects of the *Protoevangelium of James*,' *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12.3 (2004): 313–335, 321–328.
- 17 Here we encounter the concept of purity in relation to the Purity and Holiness Codes of the Hebrew Scriptures (Lev 11–29), which outline acceptable bodily status in which to approach the Holy of Holies, particularly within the Temple. Even following the destruction of the second Temple (c. 70 CE), some bodily impurities, particularly menstruation and parturition, required cleansing purification through ritual immersion (mikveh) under the laws of niddah and family purity. Kathleen O'Grady, 'The Semantics of Taboo: Menstrual Prohibitions in the Hebrew Bible,' in *Wholly Woman, Holy Blood: A Feminist Critique of Purity and Impurity* (ed. Kristin De Troyer, Judith A Herbert, Judith Ann Johnson, and Anne-Marie Korte; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 1–28.
- 18 Regarding the bitter water test, see Nutzman, 'Mary,' 559.
- 19 In contrast, both Matthew (2:1–5) and Luke (2:1–7) depict Mary giving birth to Jesus in Bethlehem.
- 20 See Bockmuehl, *Ancient*, 69–71.
- 21 Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 35.
- 22 See Nutzman, 'Mary'; Bockmuehl, *Ancient*; Horner, 'Jewish Aspects,' 313–335; Vuong, *Gender and Purity*.
- 23 Females in the Temple: Susan Grossman, 'Women and the Jerusalem Temple,' in *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue* (ed. Rivka Haut and Susan Grossman; Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 15–37 and Shaye J.D. Cohen, 'Purity and Piety: The Separation of Menstruants from the Sancta,' in Haut and Grossman, *Daughters*, 103–115; RE: Nazirites: The Nazirite 'great vow' was a vow of holiness available to all Jews (and thereby an equalizer among persons of various standing, including women), meant to express particular devotion to God. The vow itself requires that the Nazirite undertake displays of holiness and is often connected to Samuel as the 'prototype' Nazirite. Nutzman, 'Mary,' 570–78.
- 24 See Nutzman, 'Mary,' 554n8, regarding Mary's dwelling in the Holy of Holies and various interpretations thereof.
- 25 Nutzman, 'Mary,' 571–573.
- 26 Nutzman, 'Mary,' 570–578.
- 27 Glancy suggests that Mary is pre-menarcheal and twelve years of age when she gets pregnant: Jennifer A. Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 111. Horner suggests that Mary is about twelve-and-a-half years old when she becomes pregnant: Horner, 'Jewish Aspects,' 327.
- 28 Nutzman, 'Mary,' 563–570.
- 29 Different interpretations of the purpose of the bitter water test from *Numbers* 5:11–31 as a biblical parallel: Horner, 'Jewish Aspects,' 328–329, regarding the reading according to the Mishnah; Nutzman, 'Mary,' 559–563, regarding the reading according to the Torah.
- 30 Horner, 'Jewish Aspects,' 329.
- 31 Nutzman, 'Mary,' 563.
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This bibliography selects some of the items from contributors' essays and organizes those resources into categories that this volume engages, to assist researchers when studying childhood from historical perspectives. Full bibliographic data are only available in the endnotes for each essay.

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